

The Voice of the Ages Against Instrumental Music in Worship

Our Lord Jesus Christ did not use, or sanction the use of instrumental music, at least in any ordinance of worship that distinctively pertained to the New Testament dispensation.

There is no evidence that His disciples used instrumental music in any act of New Testament worship, or that they enjoined its use upon others.

The evidence is conclusive that the Christian Church after the days of the apostles did not use instrumental music in worship for several hundred years.

In all ages since the days of the apostles the most pious men have opposed the use of instruments in worship. Few, if any, among those who have been regarded as the most godly among men have voluntarily made use of instruments, and it is believed that no church court has ever enjoined, or even recommended, their use in the worship of God.

From Professor Killen's "Ancient Church"

The worship of the Synagogue was more simple. Its officers did not introduce Instrumental Music into the congregational services. The early Christians followed the example of the Synagogue; and when they celebrated the

praise of God in Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs, their melody was the fruit of their lips. For many centuries after this period, the use of Instrumental Music was unknown in the Church . . . In the Churches, as well as in the Synagogue, the whole congregation joined in the singing; but Instrumental Music was never brought into requisition.

Justin Martyr—A. D. 150

Plain singing is not childish, but only the singing with lifeless organs, with dancing and cymbals, etc. Whence the use of such instruments and other things fit for children are laid aside, and plain singing only retained.

Clemens of Alexandria—A. D. 190

We (Christians) make use only of one organ or instrument, even the peaceful Word, with which we honor God; no longer with the old psaltry, trumpet, drum, cymbal, or pipe.

Cyprian—A. D. 240

Such organs, or instruments, were then permitted them (the Old Testament Church) for this cause, even for the sake of their weakness, to stir up their minds to perform their external worship with some delight.

Chrysostom—A. D. 396

It (Instrumental Music) was permitted to the Jews, as sacrifice was, for the heaviness and grossness of their souls. God condescended to their weakness, because they were lately

drawn off from idols; but now instead of instruments we may use our bodies to praise him withal. Again, let no man deceive you, these, (instruments) appertain not to Christians; these are alien to the Catholic Church; all these things do the nations of the world seek after.

Isidore—A. D. 420

If the Divine Being, by reason of the childishness in which they then were, did allow them to offer sacrifice, why do you wonder that He also allowed them that music which is performed by the harp and psaltry?

Introduction of Instruments—666

At last, in the year 666, when the number of the beast (Rev. xiii.) was now full, the Churches received Latin singing with organs from Pope Vitalian, and from thence began to say Latin mass and to set up altars with idolatrous images.—The Magdeburg Centuriators.

Thomas Aquinas—A. D. 1225 - 1274

In the old law, God was praised both with musical instruments and human voices. But the Church does not use musical instruments lest she should seem to Judaize. Nor ought a pipe, nor any other artificial instruments, such as organ, or harp, or the like be brought into use in the Christian Church, but only those things which shall make the hearers better

men. Under the Old Testament such instruments were used, partly because the people were harder and more carnal, and partly because these bodily instruments were typical of something.

Erasmus—A.D. 1516

We have brought a cumbersome and theatrical music into our churches. Men run to church as to a theatre to have their ears tickled. And for this end, organmakers are hired with great salaries, and a company of boys who waste all their time in learning these tones. Pray, now compute how many people, in great extremity, might be maintained by the salaries of these singers.

Cardinal Cajetan—1518

The Church did not use organs in Thomas Aquinas' time, and even to this day the Church of Rome does not use them in the presence of the Pope.

Calvin—1545

Instrumental Music is not fitter to be adopted into the public worship of the Christian Church than the incense, the candlestick, and the shadows of the Mosaic law . . . In popery, a ridiculous and unsuitable imitation of the Jews, they employed organs and such other ludicrous things, by which the word and worship of God are exceedingly profaned, the people being much more attached to these rites than to the

understanding of the Divine Word . . . We know that our Lord Jesus Christ has appeared, and by His advent, has abolished these legal shadows . . . For instruments of music in Gospel times, we must not have recourse to these, unless we wish to destroy the evangelical perfection, and to obscure the meridian light which we enjoy in Christ our Lord.

Beza—A.D. 1560

If the Apostle justly prohibited the use of unknown tongues in the Church, much less would he have tolerated those artificial, musical performances, which are addressed to the ear only, and seldom strike the understanding even of the performers themselves.

Synod of Holland and Zealand—1554

In 1554 the Synod of Holland and Zealand resolved "that the ministers should endeavor to prevail with the magistrates (it was a State Church) to banish organs and Instrumental Music out of their churches."

Reformed Church of England—1558

In one of the Homilies, ratified by Act of Parliament and ordered to be read in the churches by Queen Elizabeth, a woman is introduced complaining of the reforms effected in the Church: "Alas, gossip, what shall we now do at church since all the saints are taken away, since all the goodly slights we were wont to have are gone, since we cannot hear the like

piping, singing, chanting, and playing upon the organ, that we could before?" To whom the Church replies: "Dearly beloved, we ought greatly to rejoice and give God thanks that our churches are delivered out of all those things which displeased God so sore, and filthily defiled His holy house and place of prayer."

John Knox—1560

Alluding to the principle that nothing is to be introduced into the worship of God that is not prescribed in the Word of God, John Knox writes: "This principle not only purified the Church of human inventions and Popish corruptions, but restored plain singing of Psalms, unaccompanied by Instrumental Music."

Reformed Church of Scotland—1644

In a letter to the Assembly at Westminster, 4th June, 1644, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland wrote—"We were greatly refreshed to hear, by letter of our Commissioners there with you, of your praiseworthy proceedings, and of the great good things the Lord hath wrought among you and for you. Shall it seem a small thing in our eyes that the Covenant, the foundation of the whole world, is taken? That anti-Christian Prelacy, with all the train thereof, is extirpated? That the door of a right entry unto faithful shepherds is opened; many corruptions, as altars, images, and other monuments of idolatry and superstition, removed, defaced, and abolished; the Service

Book in many places forsaken, and plain and powerful preaching set up; the great organs at Paul's and Peter's taken down; that the royal chapel is purged and reformed, sacraments sincerely administered, and according to the pattern in the mount?"

James Renwick—1687

I testify and bear witness against the vast and sinful toleration of all error and sectaries in the Belgian Church; also against their sinful formalities, such as they use in the administration of the sacraments; and such as their formal prayers, which their Professors and Doctors use in their public and private colleges: and also against all their superstitious customs, such as their observing of holy fast days, as they call them, the organs in their churches, and the like; all of which they have as the reliques of idolatry, and against every other thing amongst them contrary to sound doctrine and the power of godliness.—Renwick's Testimony.

Joseph Bingham—1668-1723

I should here have put an end to this chapter, but that some readers would be apt to reckon it an omission, that I have taken no notice of organs and bells among the utensils of the church. But the true reason is that there were no such things in use in the ancient churches for many ages. Music in churches is as ancient as the apostles, but instrumental music not so.—The Antiquities of the Christian Church.

We are sensible that it is a necessary consequence of the nature of our Reformation, that there is nothing in our worship which is proper to captivate the senses of mankind or amuse their imaginations. We have no magnificence or splendor of devotion to dazzle the eye, nor harmony of instrumental music to enliven our worship and soothe the ears of the assembly. The devotions of Christians stand in no need of the outward helps afforded to the Jews. The powers and glories of an immortal life, as represented under the Gospel, are nobler springs of devotion than the meaner helps afforded under the law, the costliness of Pontifical garments, the ceremony of worship, and the power of music.

Neale—(Commentary on the Psalms)

Here we have the first mention of musical instruments in the Psalms (Ps. xxxiii: 3). It is to be observed that the early Fathers, almost with one accord, protest against their use in churches, as they are forbidden in the Eastern Church to this day, where yet by the consent of all, the singing is infinitely superior to anything that can be heard in the West.

John Wesley—1703-1791

I have no objection to instruments being in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen.

Is it ever found that these Churches and Christian Societies which have and use instruments of music in divine worship, are more holy, or as holy, as those Societies which do not use them? And is it always found that the ministers who recommend them to be used in the worship of God, are the most spiritual men, and the most useful preachers? Can mere sounds, no matter how melodious, where no word of sentiment is or can be uttered, be considered as giving praise to God? Can God be pleased by sounds which are emitted by no sentient being, and have in themselves no meaning? If these questions cannot be answered in the affirmative, then is not the introduction of such instruments into the worship of God anti-Christian? And should not all who wish well to the spread and establishment of pure and undefiled religion, lift up their hand, their influence, and their voice against them?—Christian Theology, p. 246.

Methodist Episcopal Church

The General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1836 passed a resolution in which they solemnly enjoined upon all their ministers to discourage the introduction of instruments into the churches, and in the same resolution declared "the practice to be at variance with vital godliness."

Instruments of music were not used in the Methodist Churches until within the last fifty years; (1828) and but seldom until within the last twenty-five.

Free Methodist Church—1930

At the close of a book on "Instrumental Music in Public Worship" ordered published by the Seventeenth General Conference of the Free Methodist Church the following "Conclusions" are found among others:

5. "It (instrumental music) was excluded from the early church for many ages, and did not become common until thirteen or fourteen hundred years after Christ.

6. It does not have the endorsement, either by precept or example, of Christ or his apostles.

7. Its use is not supported by a single passage of Scripture in the New Testament.

8. Practically all the older orthodox denominations excluded its use for approximately the first century of their existence in their primitive simplicity and spiritual prosperity."

Alexander Campbell—1788-1866

So to those who have no real devotion or spirituality in them, and whose animal nature flags under the oppression of church services I think, with Mr. G., that instrumental music

would be not only a desideratum, but an essential prerequisite to fire up their souls to even animal devotion.

Daniel Sommer

The Rev. Daniel Sommer, a minister of the Christian Church, offers to take the affirmative of the following proposition in debate with any representative man among the professed disciples of Christ:

"The use of instrumental music in the worship of God through Christ is contrary to the letter and spirit of the gospel of Christ, is likewise an appeal to physical sensations, and is a deception to all that think it is of spiritual advantage to worshipers, has been a cause of division among disciples of Christ and is a heresy."

Henry Cooke, 1788-1868

It was an organic, a fundamental law of this church (the Presbyterian Church of Ireland), that the praises of the Lord should be sung without the accompaniment of instrumental music, and it could not be altered.

Precentor, Regent Square Church, London

The organ is not necessary to the harmony in modern psalmody, it is musically wrong as a leader of praise; it does not prevent flattening, and is not a proper cure for that fault; it tends to discourage general singing; it does not cor-

rect errors—it simply drowns them; it is a poor affair in the hands of most organists; it is no help to expression; it is more a fashion than anything else; it is not to be preferred to other instruments, none of which are desirable in public worship.

Principal R. S. Candlish, 1806-1872

I believe that it is a question which touches some of the highest and deepest points of Christian theology. Is the temple destroyed? Is the temple worship wholly superseded? Have we, or have we not, priests and sacrifices among us now? Is the temple or synagogue the model on which the Church of the New Testament is formed? Does the Old Testament itself point to anything but the fruit of the lips, as the peace offering or thank offering of Gospel times? Is there a trace in the New Testament of any other mode of praise? For my part, I am persuaded that, if the organ be admitted, there is no barrier in principle against the sacerdotal system in all its fulness—against the substitution in our whole religion of the formal for the spiritual, the symbolical for the real.

Principal Pirie

As long as the Church retains a high spiritual tone, the desire for them (musical instruments) will not be felt. I have never yet known a church fixedly spiritual in character begin gradually to have a tendency to sentimentalism and

sensualism in forms; that was not diminishing at the same time in spiritual-mindedness.

C. H. Spurgeon

We should like to see all the pipes of the organs in our Nonconformist places of worship either ripped open or compactly filled with concrete. The human voice is so transcendently superior to all that wind or strings can accomplish that it is a shame to degrade its harmonies by association with blowing and scraping. It is not better music which we get from organs and viols, but inferior sounds, which unsophisticated ears judge to be harsh and meaningless when compared with a melodious human voice. That the great Lord cares to be praised by bellows we very gravely question; we cannot see any connection between the glory of God and sounds produced by machinery. One broken note from a grateful heart must have more real acceptable praise in it than all the wind which sweeps through whistling pipes. Instrumental music with its flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of noise-makers, was no doubt well-suited to the worship of the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar, the king, had set up, and harps and trumpets served well the infant estate of the Church under the law, but in the Gospel's spiritual domain these may well be let go with all the other beggarly elements.

Rev. Robert Nevin—1873

The effort should be to get the people to sing universally and heartily and no paltry economy should be allowed to stand in the way of such a desirable consummation. There may be some reason to complain in many quarters of the numbers who are dumb when God's praise is being sung. The remedy is not to be found in the introduction of instruments—that will only have the effect of multiplying the number of mute listeners—but in having the people instructed in the art of singing. It is right and proper and much to be desired, not only that all should sing, but that they should do it skilfully; although there is a danger to be guarded against of being so absorbed in the outward and artistic effort, the merely bodily service, as to fall in rendering real worship in spirit and in truth. God judges not as man judges. He looks upon the heart.

John L. Girardeau—1888

Those of us who protest against this revolution (the introduction of musical instruments into the worship of God) in Presbyterian worship are by some pitied, by others ridiculed, and by others still denounced as fanatics. If we are, we share the company of an innumerable host of fanatics extending from the day of Pentecost to the middle of the nineteenth century. We refuse not to be classed, although consciously unworthy of the honor, with apostles,

martyrs and reformers. But neither were they mad, nor are we. We "speak the words of truth and soberness." Mindful of the apostolic injunction, "Prove all things," we submit arguments derived from Scripture, from the formularies of our church and from the consensus of Christ's people, and respectfully invoke for them the attention of our brethren.

Reformed Presbyterian (Covenanter)
Synod—1921

We reject all forms of will-worship, especially the introduction of uninspired compositions in the worship of God, and the use of instruments in this service, as hindrances to that blessed fellowship with God of which the soul is capable, and urge the employment only of those pure spiritual forms which God has appointed in His Word.

WITNESS COMMITTEE
of the
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
of
North America
Empire Building
Pittsburgh, Pa.