

# The BEACON

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## YOUR ATTENTION IS URGENTLY NEEDED ON PAGE 3 OF THIS BEACON

**\*\*\* RETURNED MAIL IS COSTING THE  
CONGREGATION IN NEWTON HUNDREDS OF  
DOLLARS EACH YEAR AND WE ARE IN THE  
PROCESS OF RE-EXAMINING HOW TO  
BETTER USE THE LORD'S FUNDS \*\*\***



### Evolution of Defense for Instrumental Music - Part Two

Ron Halbrook, Xenia, Ohio

The aid or expediency argument was to play a major role. A large segment of brethren granted that instruments fell into the realm of expediency but felt they were inexpedient. Isaac Errett pled for better singing in 1861 but regarded the instrument as not expedient, as hindering congregational participation and emphasizing artistic performance. In 1864, W.K. Pendleton was asked about the "Pew-Renting and Organ-Music" appearing in a few churches. He warned that such things represented the spirit of "monied nabobs" and were inexpedient because interfering with the "free, full, grateful, heartfelt

singing of the whole congregation." [\(11\)](#)

Many other brethren believed that expediency was not the basic issue since God specified singing, which is a specific in the generic class of music. In an 1864 exchange on a different subject, Thomas Munnell argued from the "absence of any Scripture condemnation" and J.W. McGarvey answered that the restoration plea - "the Bible alone" - confines men "to what is taught in the Bible . . . the omission of anything from scripture teaching is sufficient to justify us in objecting to it as religious doctrine." [\(12\)](#) These divergent positions were to play a major role in the

instrument controversy. Observing that the earlier "unanimity in the rejection of instrumental music from our public worship" was beginning to erode, McGarvey called in 1864 for a fresh and thorough study of the subject. He noted that its defense was being made (1) the Jewish temple worship, (2) John's vision of heaven with angels harping, (3) the silence of the New Testament, and (4) the aid argument. But McGarvey called for positive authority from the New Testament for every element of worship "in the Christian dispensation." Only by express revelation can we know "what acts of worship are acceptable to God." Vocal music is specifically authorized (which permits the use of singing aids such as song books), but instrumental music introduces another "chief element in the joyful sound" of worship.

To introduce any such element is unscriptural and presumptuous. It is will worship, if any such thing as will worship can exist. On this ground we condemn the burning of incense, the lighting of candles, the wearing of priestly robes, and the reading of printed prayers. On the same ground we condemn instrumental music.

Thus McGarvey argued that the New Testament positively authorized singing and is silent about playing instruments -presumptive proof against the latter practice. A.S. Hayden immediately answered that McGarvey must produce "affirmative proof" (i.e. direct statements) condemning instruments, and added that the instrument antedated Moses' Law and so did not pass away with it. McGarvey's response pointed out that the Law of Moses included instruments by specific mention and that the burden of proof for their introduction in the gospel age requires similar specific, affirmative statements of revelation. The exchange ended with Hayden claiming the Jews were not required to use instruments in worship and it is only a matter of liberty today, and McGarvey countering that specific revelation in Moses' Law made the practice both a privilege and a duty whereas its omission from the New Testament condemns the practice today. [\(13\)](#) The lines of battle were now set.

### The Middle Years Debate and Division (1866-1906)

The defeat of those who granted that the instrument was an expediency issue and who opposed it on inexpediency was doomed to fail as soon as enough brethren were swayed by the times to desire instruments in music. Other forces than the instrument controversy were at work. For instance, in a major address defending missionary societies in 1866, Pendleton, respected editor of the Millennial Harbinger, came out with sweeping denial of the established concept of taking "the silence of Scripture on a given subject as a positive rule of prohibition." Instead, silence means liberty. [\(14\)](#) Likewise, in 1868 A.S. Hayden renewed under the banner of "Expediency Progress," his protest against any argument from silence in the Bible by brethren opposing instruments. A worried McGarvey retorted that the instrument issue "is becoming a serious one" and the kind of "progress" which promotes such practices "finds in me an enemy." There must be total war "against everything not expressly or by necessary implication authorized in the New Testament." Hayden then claimed that he was not promoting the instrument but only opposing those who treat the question as "a subject matter of the faith" rather than one of expediency. [\(15\)](#) I.B. Grubbs next engaged Hayden that year on the same ground of battle, each man writing two articles. Then it was Grubbs and J. S. Lamar, Lamar claiming that Psalm 87 predicts instruments in New Testament worship (as an expedient or nonessential), Grubbs replying that his interpretation is fanciful and the New Testament itself is the all-sufficient rule. Other writers joined the discussion, adding nothing new, and Pendleton tried unsuccessfully to close the debate. He was frustrated on one side by those who shared his expediency concept but would not take his word that the organ was inexpedient and, on the other side, by those who shared his opposition to instruments but opposed them on grounds of principle. In the years which followed, the silence-means-liberty argument couple with the desire for instruments trampled under foot Pendleton's attempt to keep them out as inexpedient. Through about 1885 several well-known preachers such as McGarvey, Robret Graham, and Moses E. Lard tried to oppose the instrument on principle but accept the

missionary societies as expedients. This compromise also drew fire from both sides and utterly failed, sweeping the churches which followed it into the instrument cause. In the long run, only those brethren who consistently applied the restoration principle to exclude both the society and organ could preserve the New Testament pattern of worship.

In the early years of debate, three basic positions had emerged, which were to be repeated and adapted in the years ahead. They are (1) There are passages which specify that the instrument is authorized. (2) No passage specifies that the instrument is authorized, but it may be considered on grounds of expediency. (3) There are passages which specify singing but none which specify the instrument; the revelation which prescribes one proscribes the other. During 1868-69, the Christian Standard published exchanges between H.T. Anderson, who argued there is no law against organs and therefore expediency applies, and Robert Richardson, who answered that expediency must be first within bounds of law. He explained that Paul was under law to Christ and that all expediencies must be proven lawful (1 Cor. 9:21; 6:12).

Law prescribes the things that may be done. Expediency selects from among them what is most suitable in a given case. Hence, expediency must always occupy a place within and under law, and in no case can go beyond or contrary to law.

This (the instrument, RH) can never be a question of expediency, for the simple reason that there is not law prescribing or authorizing it. If it were any where said, in the New Testament, that Christians should use instruments, then it would become a question of expediency what kind of instrument was to be used, whether an organ or a melodian, the "loud-sounding cymbals," or the "light guitar;" whether it should cost \$50, or \$500, or \$1,000; and what circumstances should regulate the performance. It happens, however, that this is no where said; and, consequently, no such questions of expediency can ever arise in a church that is truly and really governed by the law of the Lord. When someone attempted to show that instruments were "implied in the word psalms" (as in Eph. 5:19),

Richardson commended the effort to find Bible authority, which would open the way to discuss expediencies. But Richardson rebuffed the attempt because instruments cannot fulfill the demands of the law to speak and teach in psalms and because it is perfectly well known that instruments were added to Christian worship several hundreds of years after the New Testament period. He concluded that the demands of Scripture did not produce instruments in worship but the desire for instruments demanded "plausibilities" to justify the innovation.<sup>(16)</sup>

Isaac Errett, editor of the Christian Standard, advised against using organs because he knew they caused division, but he battled those who opposed instruments on principle. He claimed their use resulted from poor singing in the churches and from advanced musical culture in the homes, but denied that any vital principle of truth was involved. But J. W. McGarvey said that using a musical instrument is not a method of singing so is not authorized as an aid or expediency

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under the command to sing; he denied that organs represented true growth or progress. "True progress is still backward - backward toward the apostles, toward the doctrine, the terms of pardon, the worship and the discipline which they instituted."<sup>(17)</sup> An exchange between Errett in the Standard and antagonists in the Apostolic Times occurred in 1870. After J.B. Briney went over to the instrument cause, he and McGarvey debated in the Times during 1881.

From time to time, proponents of the instruments attempted to prove that it inheres in psallo, from which is translated "speaking . . . in psalms . . . singing and making melody in your heart" (Eph. 5:19). About 1866-67, an exchange appeared in one periodical, with one man claiming the term in the New Testament meant worshipping with musical instruments accompanied by singing and the other saying the term in the New Testament meant praising God with the voice in song. It was discussed again in 1869. George P. Slade in the 1878 American Christian Review attacked McGarvey's ground of New Testament silence by appealing to psallo. Having examined this approach for many years, McGarvey said in 1895 that anyone taking it "is one of those smatterers in Greek who can believe anything that he wishes to believe. When the wish is father to the thought correct exegesis is like water on a duck's back." Such strictures did not keep Briney from resorting to the argument again a decade later.<sup>(18)</sup>

During the 1880s, an argument circulated which claimed that the organ may be used as an aid to singing without being considered "in the worship" because the worship takes place altogether in the heart. McGarvey countered that the Bible speaks of ceremonial washings of persons, cups, pots, and brazen vessels, and of many other outward actions as being in the worship (Mk. 7:3, 7; Col. 2:20-23). Even the Psalms speak of praising God in worship with the sounds of instruments. "To deny, then, that the present use of instrumental music in the church is a part of the worship, is a subterfuge and an afterthought ingeniously against vain worship and will worship."<sup>(19)</sup>

**“REJOICE IN THE LORD, ALWAYS”**