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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 One

Ron Halbrook, Xenia, Ohio

During the first half of the 1800's, the work of restoring New Testament Christianity in America grew and prospered. But in the decades following the War Between the States, the ship of Zion floundered on, the sandbar of apostasy. The rise of liberal attitudes toward Bible authority resulted in an effort to centralize the work of churches through human institutions and in an effort to modernize the worship by using instrumental music. After a few observations, this article will trace several stages in the defense

of and debate over instrumental music in worship.

The arguments evolved in the introduction and defense of instrumental music, in practical effect, nullify the Bible plea for adherence to the inspired standard of truth in all things. The all-sufficiency and unity in truth, coupled with an abhorrence of human traditions, are reflected in Thomas Campbell's famous maxim of 1809: "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; and where

the Bible is silent, we are Silent" (see 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Cor. 1:10; Jn. 17:20-21; Matt. 15:7-8). When one man objected that such a plea would preclude the precious tradition of infant baptism, Campbell, himself a paedo-Baptist at the time, replied, "Of course, if infant baptism be not found in Scripture, we can have nothing to do with it."⁽¹⁾ By the same token, Jesus dared not pretend to be a priest under the Old Law because He was of Judah, "of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood" (Heb. 7:14). God's specific approbation of a given thing in a class of things serves as a specific prohibition of all others. "Wherefore, Divine revelation gives bounds, positively and negatively, unto the worship of God."⁽²⁾ Arguing, "Either there is a divinely authorized order of Christian worship . . . or there is not," Alexander Campbell reduced the no-pattern position to an absurdity which precludes "no disorder, no error, no innovation, no transgression." Since he believed that "our whole religion, objectively and doctrinally considered, is founded in a book,"⁽³⁾ he believed that the action of worship is limited to positive divine revelation in the Bible. Noting that religious dances, harps, psalteries, and trumpets are not once named in the New Testament, he condemned them and dismissed them for "all spiritually minded Christians" as useless "as a cow bell in a concert."⁽⁴⁾

The instrumental music controversy was protracted and heated because the new practice compromised the restoration plea. The instrument was but a straw in the wind, evidence of a drift away from strict dedication to the imperatives of Christ in Scripture. Oft the desire for instruments in worship was accompanied by polite excuses for social dancing, so that the two are discussed jointly.⁽⁵⁾ Many of the churches

which became broad-minded about such practices also became breeding grounds for the modernism of the late 1800's with its compromises on the verbal inspiration of Scripture, the necessity of immersion, the reality of Bible miracles, evolutionary philosophy, and cooperation with denominationalism. Moses Lard had warned in 1864 that since the instrument is without "affirmative or positive sanction" in the New Testament, a church which "sets up an organ in its house . . . reaches the first station on the road to apostasy." Drawing from the experience of other religious bodies which introduced entertainments in worship, C.L. Loos warned that "the progress is onward, or rather, downward."⁽⁶⁾ This analysis was confirmed some twenty years later when David Lipscomb decried the rationalism and infidelity which had followed in the trail of earlier innovations - "one innovation but prepares for a dozen others to follow." In effect, a church which adds the instrument "rejects God that he should reign over them." Though the organ is small from a human standpoint, "it tests our willingness or unwillingness to abide in the appointments of the Lord."⁽⁷⁾

The evolution of defense for instrumental music is the story of debate and division. The instrument gained ground first in larger Northern cities, in larger established churches, among the affluent and socially prominent. Benjamin Franklin estimated in 1868 that about 50 out of 10,000 churches used an instrument, but by the century's end the proportions were nearly reversed. By then, a number of differences could be seen between the two groups, but the instrument continued to serve in debate as a test case which reflected the

rationale for all the other differences. The rise and history of the instrument's defense among brethren did not occur in a vacuum. The practice and major arguments for it were borrowed from denominationalism. A wide range of arguments was available from the start, though various ones attained more or less prominence from time to time. Proponents strained their ingenuity in adapting and using a proliferation of rationalizations, a process occurring only after the desire for the instrument had arisen. It is not the case that godly, humble saints pouring over the Bible at long last concluded that an element of New Testament faith or practice had been overlooked, and thus demanded the instrument and defended it at the price of division. The basic desire was to keep up with the denominations.

First Signs of Trouble: Early Introduction and Defense (1850-66)

Early in 1851, J. Henshall was asked by a man who said "we are far in the rear of Protestants" whether "instrumental music in our churches" would consummate "the great object of Psalmody." He replied that the worldly minded might seek such "helps to their devotion," but true spiritual worship had no place for an entertaining display, a choir, and "a wooden devotion quickener." This opened discussion in the Ecclesiastic Reformer for a short time. John Rogers, in astonishment that any preacher would defend the instrument, wrote to Alexander Campbell, who called upon all preachers to "cry aloud and spare not" in opposing the practice. Campbell shortly added that "the argument drawn from the Psalms in favor of instrumental music" befits Catholic and Protestant churches which seek "the Jewish pattern of things" to stir their carnal hearts.⁽⁸⁾ The 1850s saw precious little advance in the instrument cause; almost no

one favored it. "It is scarcely necessary for us to say to our readers that we regard the organ and violin worship, and even the fashionable choir singing of our country, as mockery of all that is sacred," said Tolbert Fanning in the 1856 Gospel Advocate.⁽⁹⁾ The next flare-up revealed that fifty years after Thomas Campbell's Declaration and Address (1809), Dr. L. L. Pinkerton had placed a melodeon in the church at Midway, Kentucky. Answering a question in January 1860, Benjamin Franklin mused that a church without the Spirit of Christ might need an instrument for amusement and entertainment in place of religion and worship. This stung Pinkerton because he was the only church known to be using one. Offering the aid argument, he said the singing had been so bad as to "scare even the rats from worship." Practice sessions with its use had been followed by use in regular worship.⁽¹⁰⁾

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In An article cited from The [Jacksonville] Florida Times-Union, March 7, 1978: "Home Not Too Bad, Boy Finds." We are then told of a Chattanooga 9-year-old boy who told his parents if they whipped him, he would call the police and report that they were child-abusers.

"I finally got tired of it all and decided to call his bluff," the mother reported. "I called the police myself."

Mr. Foster says: "The boy was told by the police that he could be made a ward of the court and be sent to a juvenile home where he would have to share everything with the other 100 children."

"The boy calmed down when he realized we weren't kidding and found out he had a better home than he thought," the police stated.

Yes, children certainly have rights! They have rights to parents who will love and discipline them. The Bible still says: "He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently" (Prov. 13:24 NASB).

May we raise our voices with others against the sickening spectacle of genuine child abuse. But keep an eye out for the approaching danger of this other extreme.

“Psalm 127:3

“Lo, children *are* an heritage of the LORD: *and* the fruit of the womb *is his* reward.”