

Instrumental Music in Churches and Dancing.

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<http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/people/mlard.html>

<http://www.geocities.com/moseslard/qtrly/dancing.htm>

In settling any question, whether theoretic or practical, the first thing to be agreed upon is the standard of final appeal. Without this our discussions are mere endless wranglings, and our arguments little else than mere circular talk. Neither error in thought nor error in practice is corrected. Strife is engendered and issue joined, but neither that nor this ever finds an end. Positions are taken which are untenable, and replies are made which are illogical and gratuitous; while parties are formed seemingly without the hope of remedy; and all this for the want of some standard to which appeal can be at once and decisively made. Now that we as a people have agreed to accept the New Testament as that standard is a fact too notorious to admit of question. To this we have consented to bring the smallest point of doctrine, and the most trivial feature in practice. And furthermore, we have solemnly covenanted that whatever cannot be clearly shown to have the sanction of this standard shall be held as not doctrine, and shall not be practiced. We say shown to have the sanction; for it is not enough to warrant a practice that this standard does not sanction it. No practice can be defended on this ground. To warrant the holding of a doctrine or practice it must be shown that it has the affirmative or positive sanction of this standard, and not merely that it is not condemned by it. Either it must be actually asserted or necessarily implied, or it must be positively backed by some divinely approved precedent, otherwise it is not even an item in Christianity, and is therefore, when it is attempted to be made a part of it, criminal and wrong. Right in itself, and when standing apart from Christianity it may be, but when the effort is made to constitute it either a part of the Christian doctrine or of the Christian worship then both the act to do so and the thing itself become marked with the deepest stains of sin. In itself as a mere act we think it perfectly innocent to sprinkle water on the face of an infant; but when the attempt is made to foist it into and incorporate it with Christianity, then the frown and anathema of Heaven lie on it. To all of which we as members of the body of Christ have bound ourselves in solemn acts and covenants. The simple fact that we claim to hold a place in the family of God is proof of this. As a people we have from the first and continually to the present proclaimed that the New Testament and that alone is our only full and perfect rule of faith and practice. We have [330] declared a thousand times and more that whatever it does not teach we must not hold, and whatever it does not sanction we must not practice. He who ignores or repudiates these principles, whether he be preacher or layman, has by the act become an apostate from our ranks; and the sooner he lifts his hand high, avows the fact, and goes out from amongst us the better, yes, verily, the better for us.

I. Now in the light of the foregoing principles what defense can be urged for the introduction into some of our congregations of instrumental music? The answer which thunders into my ear from every page of the New Testament is, none. Did Christ ever appoint it? did the apostles ever sanction it? or did any one of the primitive churches ever use it? Never. In what light then must we view him who attempts to introduce it into the churches of Christ of the present day? I answer, as an insulter of the authority of Christ, and as a defiant and impious innovator on the simplicity and purity of the ancient worship. In no other light can we view him, in no other light should he be viewed. But we are told that there is no harm in instrumental music, and that therefore it may be innocently introduced into the churches of Christ. I shall certainly attempt no grave reply to this shallow thing; for argument I

will not call it. Grant, then, for a moment that there is no harm in instrumental music. The question arises what kind of instrument shall be used? An organ, shouts the sickly puling of Rome. An organ indeed! and shall we have only an organ? Is there no good music in anything else than an organ? We know there is. Why then have only an organ? This is arbitrary and tyrannical. But what must signify arbitrariness and tyranny in a church which has consented to be disgraced by an organ? Simply nothing. These are now its spirit and law, and of course, no offense to it. But despite of even these, for now we care nothing for strife, nothing for the feelings of the brethren, we shall insist on the right both for self and others to introduce each for himself the instrument with which he can best conduct his worship. For the son of Mars, then, we claim the right to introduce the fife and the drum; and for the self the right to introduce, for I could never make music on anything else, but am capital on these, the Jews-harp, the tin-pan, and the barrel-head. I even go farther, and with all the pluck of a Lacedemonian contend for the right of the Caledonian to have his bagpipes, and the ancient Israelite his ram's horns. To all of which let us still add a few fiddles, a tamborine, and a gong. Vive la music made on instruments! This is about as like pandemonium as anything we can well imagine, and about as near that place as we can well get unless we could get between [331] that place and the church that has adopted instrumental music, and we think there is left little room between the two on which to stand. Soberly and candidly we are pained at these symptoms of degeneracy in a few of our churches. The day on which a church sets an organ in its house, is the day on which it reaches the first station on the road to apostasy. From this it will soon proceed to other innovations; and the work of innovating once fairly commenced, no stop can be put to it till ruin ensues. And then the spirit which precedes and fosters these innovations is a most dangerous spirit—dangerous because cruel, intractable, and unreasonable. It is cruel because it is ready to immolate everything that in the least stands in the way of its wicked work; intractable, because it will not yield on even one tittle of its innovations; and unreasonable, because it will heed neither the voice of God nor that of man. Indeed, when a church has once introduced an organ, we believe it to be true, as a general rule, of those members who take the lead in the work, that they will suffer its Bible to be torn into shreds before they will part from their pet. No matter how unanimous or how kind the voice of remonstrance may be, the spirit of innovation never retraces its steps. When once it sets in to accomplish a certain object, accomplish that object it will, though ruin marks every step in its advance. Church history teems with proofs of what is here said. Let now, as further evidence of this, any set of brethren, no matter how pious and true, set about inducing a church which has introduced an organ, to put it away, and these brethren will soon fall under its proscriptions and it will absolutely go to the length of putting them away before it will put away its organ. It will part from everything and anything rather than its infamous box.

But what shall be done with such churches? Of course nothing. If they see fit to mortify the feelings of their brethren, to forsake the example of the primitive churches, to contemn the authority of Christ by resorting to will worship, to excite dissension, and give rise to general scandal, they must do it. As a body we can do nothing. Still we have three partial remedies left us to which we should at once resort. 1. Let every preacher in our ranks resolve at once that he will never, under any circumstances or on any account, enter a meeting house belonging to our brethren in which an organ stands. We beg and entreat our preaching brethren to adopt this an unalterable rule of conduct. This and like evils must be checked, and the very speediest way to effect is the one here suggested. 2. Let no brother who takes a letter from one church ever unite with another using an organ. Rather let him live out of church rather than go into such a den. [332] 3. Let those brethren who oppose the introduction of an organ first remonstrate in gentle, kind, but decided terms. If their remonstrance is unheeded, and the organ is brought in, then let them at once, and without even the formality of asking for a letter, abandon the church so acting; and let all such members unite elsewhere. Thus these organ-grinding

churches will in the lapse of time be broken down, or wholly apostatize, and the sooner they are in fragments the better for the cause of Christ. I have no sympathy with them, no fellowship with them, and so help me God never intend knowingly to put my foot into one of them. As a people we claim to be engaged in an effort to return to the purity, simplicity, freedom from ostentation and pride, of the ancient apostolic churches. Let us, then, neither wink at any thing standing in the way, nor compromise aught essential to this end. The moment we do so our unity is at an end, and our hopes are in the dust.

II. Next in regard to Christians dancing. We frankly confess we feel ashamed and scandalized at the prevalence, in many sections of the country, of this licentious practice amongst the children of our brethren. And what hurts us little less is the fact that some even of the older brethren and sisters are giving it their countenance. Nay, they go so far as to encourage and justify it on the score that there is no harm in it; and in some cases actually send their children to dancing schools. For the sake of all such let us grant their universal plea of no harm in it, and see what it results in. There is, then no harm in dancing; and of course no harm in any Christian's dancing. Now suppose that those who urge this plea should, on going into that intoxicating and bewildering place called the ball-room, see Bro. Campbell, Bro. John Smith, Bro. John Rogers, with other like aged and venerable men in Christ, actually engaged in a waltz, hugging other men's wives round over the floor. Could any other than a feeling of profound disgust seize them? But why? There is no harm in dancing! Yet we should feel not merely shocked at the incongruity of such a sight, but positively amazed. But how is this? These are, of all men, the ones whom dancing is the least likely to corrupt; yet our feelings utterly refuse to be reconciled to their act. Surely this plea of no harm in it cannot be sound. But further, suppose that on some Lord's day, just after weeping over and partaking of the emblems of the Lord's body and blood, a member of some church should arise and propose to clear away the seats, and that the whole church should engage in a dance; and suppose that this should actually be done. Nay further, let us suppose it to be repeated from Lord's day to Lord's day throughout the year. Would those who cry no harm in it be [333] willing to belong to such a church, or would they even be willing for their dancing children to be reared up in it? Hardly, we think. But why? If there be no harm in dancing, then is there no harm in dancing on the Lord's day, none in dancing in the Lord's house. The truth is, this plea is simply a specious lie with which Satan is at this time drugging these members. Let those who urge it first show that there is no harm in dancing before they ask us to acquiesce. Let them either show where it has the sanction of Christ or the apostles, or was practiced in some primitive church; or else let them forever cease to urge this plea, and abandon the practice. If they will not do this, then let them go out of the church of God into the world where they properly belong. The church never parts from aught but trouble when it parts from such members. If they can be reclaimed and saved by all just means let this be done; but the church should make no compromise, not for one day, with dancing. Let its action be kind but firm, and terribly prompt. This alone will save. Of all the unsanctioned acts a church has to deal with, none demands prompter treatment than dancing. It is one of those specious and insidious evils which must be cured in its very inception, or it is never cured. Tolerate it, and by and by those who advocate it will claim the right by prescription to engage in it. Remonstrance is vain then. Our churches should lift a unanimous voice against it, and proceed to rid themselves of it with an energy and a promptitude which would leave not a vestige of it in Zion. Let the world know, but especially let professors know, that it must be completely and forever abandoned. A stand like this once taken and maintained with dignity and firmness, and the evil is soon cured. But as long as the shilly-shallying course of some of our churches is persisted in, dancing will increase in them until it ultimately becomes the rule; then the result is clear. Attempt to correct it now, and dancing will exclude the church, and not the church dancing.

But just here, and before we close this short piece, a favorite position of the dancer and organ advocate needs to be noticed and disposed of. Each claims that since the New Testament does not in express words condemn its hobby, he therefore has the same right to have it that others have to exclude it; and that he is under no more obligation to yield his preference than is the opponent to yield his opposition. But this position is not sound. A man has a right to hold as a matter of conscience every doctrine the New Testament clearly teaches, and to practice as a matter of conscience every act it clearly sanctions; and beyond this a Christian conscience is a myth. Nay, further: I am bound in conscience to be opposed to everything not thus indorsed.[334] Now when the dancer claims the right to introduce dancing, he claims the right to innovate in a matter in which I am bound to have conscience and he is bound to have none, I cannot therefore yield to him, but he must yield to me. He must consequently abandon dancing if I object to it. For suppose me bound to yield to him in a case in which I am to have conscience and he is to have none. This of course would confer on me the right to require him to yield to me in a precisely similar case. How then would stand the matter? Simply thus, that I must yield to him both when I have and when I have not conscience, and that he must do the same with me. But this is folly and nonsense. Hence when I object, the dancer can introduce dancing on no ground save that of a criminal and wicked disregard of my conscience and my feelings, and he who does this is unworthy of a place in the church of the living God, and we say put him away. In many instances the remedy is painful we know; but, we repeat, the evil must be checked.

No greater curse can befall the church of Christ than to popularize it by tolerating within it this and like dangerous practices. By so doing I grant we may increase its members of a certain kind, but its piety and purity we should reduce to a low, very low grade. The church gains nothing by strewing the path that leads into it with flowers, and providing downy beds for those who dwell within it. Self-denial, labor, and a perpetual mortification of the flesh, are its glory and the pledge of its success. Let men know that the condition on which they can enter the church is that they part from all that pampers carnality and promotes pride, and you immeasurably increase its attractiveness. When sin gives exquisite pain and the soul sighs for the rest and the life which are in Christ Jesus, dancing and an organ are detested and shunned. The heart that delights in them and advocates them has never communed long with itself over its corruptions and deep wants. Christianity is designed to make men new creatures. The old life with its revelries, its fun, its high bursts of fleshly glee, its show and worldly usages, is exchanged for one in which pleasure is drawn from conformity to the will of him who wept and sorrowed, but never danced nor fawned on an organ, and from cultivating the most affectionate and tender regard for the feelings of such of God's children as weep over even the most trivial innovation, and from mingling in scenes which fill us with grief, steep us in sympathy, and start within us the holiest resolutions our natures can give birth to. This is the school in which Christians should aim to fit themselves for heaven, and not the ball-room. I never knew a dancing Christian on his dying bed to send for a dancer to comfort him, nor a fiddle called [335] for in the chamber where death completes his work. Let no Christian think that he can scandalize the church of God with the evils of which we are speaking and stand approved in the judgment day. He sports with criminal carelessness with his future destiny who so thinks. God will not suffer himself to be mocked with impunity by the impious daring of him who insults his children on earth and wounds their best feelings by dragging these innovations into the church. Here such a party may escape. The want of strictness in the churches, and the shuffling indifference of overseers, may give him little pain; but the day of reckoning hastens on. The churches of Christ in the whole land owe it to themselves and to the high and just ground they have taken, to guard with sleepless vigilance against even the semblance of an innovation on the practice and usages of the apostolic churches. Apostasies begin with things that "have no harm in them," and end in ruin. At first they creep, but in the end stride continents at a

single step. Finally we say watch, beware!

End with 12.5 too