Church History and Instrumental Music

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MISCONCEPTION: That the Church of Christ started or invented the issue of instrumental music to provoke controversy with the denominational world.

Most denominational members have never thought to question the use of instrumental music in their worship.

Except for the Churches of Christ, no one would oppose the music.

DOES THE DENOMINATIONAL WORLD KNOW?

When M.C. Kurfees wrote his book on instrumental music in 1911 he used a quote from John Spencer Curwen, a member of the Royal Academy of Music in London.

Curwen stated “Men still living can remember the time when organs were very seldom found outside the Church of England. The Methodists, Independents, and Baptists rarely had them, and by the Presbyterians they were stoutly opposed.”

NOTE: This is talking about prominent denominations at the time, not about the Church of Christ.

JOHN WESLEY—founder of Methodism “The Methodist Church,” said “I have no objections to instruments of music in our chapels provided they are neither heard or seen.”

DAVID BENEDICT—A Baptist historian stated, “Staunch old Baptists in former times would as soon have tolerated the Pope of Rome in their pulpits as an organ in their galleries and yet the instrument has gradually found its way among them.”

JOHN CALVIN—founder of the Presbyterian Church declared, Musical instruments in celebrating the praise of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps and the restoration of the other shadows of the law.”

If the Church is to be peculiar in their opposition to instrumental music, then they must stand in line with former scholars and writers who held the same conviction.

EVERETT FERGUSON—Ph.D. Harvard University has observed—“According to the NT evidence, instrumental music was not present in the worship of the early church. The conclusion drawn from NT texts and from linguistic evidence was that instrumental music was not present in the worship of the NT Church.”

JAMES W. McKINNON—Ph.D. Columbia University noted, “instruments were not used in the patristic period. (Covering the first 400 years of the Church) In fact, the Fathers of the early church were virtually unanimous in their hostility toward musical instruments.”

We must understand that opposition to instrumental music did not arise in recent times but was prevalent from the beginning of the Church.

Modern man is the ones who are out of touch with historical research and the knowledge of historical events.

Some research suggest that instrumental music got its start about 666AD with Pope Vitalian I, while other research states that music was not started until the tenth century. Thus this makes the instrumental music an innovation of the Catholic Church.

This tells us that Christians of the New Testament Church did not ever hear music in their worship.

McKinnon further states that unlike the Temple the Synagogue did not employ instruments of music, in fact there is the patristic, polemic (written and voiced opinion) against music.

It is sad that those who have claimed to recently studied the issue of instrumental music and its use in the church have failed to look at key factors:

1. The NT Church had no instrumental music, but they sang with grace in their hearts to the Lord.
2. There was complete hostility to instruments in worship in the writings of the church fathers for several hundred years.
3. Instrumental music did not come into general use until approximately the tenth century, long after the time of Christ and the apostles.
4. Instrumental music was introduced into church worship by the Catholic Church, not by the inspired men who wrote the New Testament.
5. It was a late innovation of the medieval Catholic Church.
6. The founders and leaders of prominent denominational bodies, including John Calvin and John Wesley, were opposed to instruments in worship. Churches of Christ stand today where many religious bodies once stood before they adopted a practice borrowed from Roman Catholicism.
7. At one time Baptist did not use instrumental music in worship. They would as soon welcomed the Pope of Rome into their pulpits, but gradually over a period of time it found its way among them.
8. The praise of the church in the New Testament was vocal by which they could teach and admonish one another. There is no teaching or admonishing in the tones of instruments.
9. If we would be like the original first-century church established by Christ, we would sing and make a melody in our hearts, not with a mechanical instrument.
10. Men worship in vain who rely on the doctrines and commandments of men

Matthew 15:9

Acts 17:11

I Peter 3:15

John 4:24

Matthew 16:18

Acts 2:42

II John 9

Jude 3

Philippians 1:17