

THE VOICE OF THE PIONEERS ON INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Back in 1932 Bro. John T. Lewis of Birmingham published a book he entitled, *The Voice of the Pioneers on Instrumental Music and Societies*. That book, long out of print, served a useful purpose to clarify the thinking of our brethren and to refute the false claims of those who were promoting the use of instruments in worship.

Bro. Glenn McCoy has recently given us an excellent book on Restoration history. In the 15th chapter of his book, *Return to the Old Paths*, he discusses the rise of the instrumental music controversy among our brethren from c.a. 1860 to 1900. I share with you some quotes that will help you understand what our leading preachers thought about the subject 125 years ago.

Alexander Campbell wrote: "I wonder not then that an organ, a fiddle, or a Jewsharp, should be requisite to stir up their carnal hearts, and work into ecstasy their animal souls, else 'hosannas languish on their tongues and their devotions die.' And that all persons who have no spiritual discernment, taste or relish for their spiritual meditations, consolations and sympathies of renewed hearts should call for such aid, is but natural...So to those who have no real devotion or spirituality in the church and whose animal nature flags under the oppression church service, 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. But I presume to all spiritually minded Christians such aids would be as a cow bell in a concert" (p. 227).

Benjamin Franklin, the gospel preacher was asked if there might be occasions when instrumental music would be acceptable. Franklin, with dripping sarcasm responded:

- "Where a church never had, or has lost the Spirit of Christ..
- "If a church has a preacher who never had or has lost the Spirit of Christ, who has become a dry, prosing and lifeless speaker, so as to be entirely incapable of commanding and interesting an audience, it is thought that instrumental music would draw out and interest the people.
- "If a church only intends being a fashionable society, a mere place of amusement and secular entertainment, and abandoning all idea of religion and worship, instrumental music would be a very pleasant and agreeable part of such entertainment" (p. 228).

John W. McGarvey wrote: "In the earlier years of the Reformation, there was entire unanimity in the rejection of instrumental music from our public worship. It was declared unscriptural, inharmonious with the Christian institution, and a source of corruption. In the course of time individuals here and there called in

question the correctness of this decision and attempt was occasionally made to introduce instruments in some churches..." "...I again repeat, that every man who bows to the authority of God's word, must oppose the use of instrumental music in the church..." (p. 230-231).

Moses Lard: Responding to the question, "What should be done with the churches using instrumental music, said, "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 condemn 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...Let those brethren who oppose the introduction of an organ first remonstrate in gentle, kind and 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" (p. 232-233).

Robert Richardson wrote, "The introduction of a musical instrument into a church is a triumph of the sensual over the spiritual" (p. 237).

These great men of God and those who shared their convictions were shouted down by their peers. Most of our churches preferred their organs to the fellowship of those who would not accept that unscriptural innovation. The result was the separation of the Disciples of Christ and Christian Churches from us. After a full century of recovery and rebuilding we have the bizarre spectacle of a few preachers among us, introducing instrumental music into their worship. Satan never rests. Fools never learn.

JHW