

Why Did D. S. Warner Oppose the Use of Instrumental Music in Worship?

C. E. Orr, in writing of his memories of D. S. Warner, said “He taught plainly and forcibly against the use of musical instruments in the worship of God. None of the congregations [of the Church of God] used them in his day.”

C. E. Brown, in his book *When the Trumpet Sounded*, says, “As a matter of historic fact, D. S. Warner stood ... in the historic tradition of radical Christianity, extending from the dissidents from Roman Catholicism in the eleventh century down through the Anabaptists into the radical Christianity of modern times. ... Actually, as the historian of theology can show, every doctrine, *save one*, which D. S. Warner taught had been taught in large groups of Christians at one time or another throughout Christian history. ... We reserved one point of Warner’s teaching as a novelty. This was his doctrine concerning the identity, or at least the possible identity, between the visible and invisible church. When we say that the doctrine of the identity of the visible and invisible church is a novelty, we mean in modern theological thinking. It **was** the doctrine of the church during the first century that the normal church is both visible and invisible at the same time. ... Warner preached this doctrine assiduously from the first issues of *The Gospel Trumpet* throughout his life.” – Excerpts from *When the Trumpet Sounded*, pages 83-87.

According to historical record, it seems that instrumental music was not introduced into the so-called *Christian* church until quite late in the apostate era of Roman Catholicism, and even then, the Catholic Church itself accepted their use reluctantly? The Greek Orthodox Church never accepted mechanical instruments into their worship at all, and it is evident that several Protestant reformers removed them from worship. The word “a cappella” is an Italian word, coming from two Latin words, “a” meaning “according to,” and “cappella” meaning “chapel.” Webster defines “a cappella” thus: “In the style of church or chapel music; especially in the old style, without accompaniment.” It appears that this was the style of church music from apostolic times. The reader will find the following quotations of interest.

“There can be no doubt that originally that music of the divine service was everywhere entirely of a vocal nature.” – Emil Numan, *The History of Music*.

“We have no real knowledge of the exact character of the music which formed a part of the religious devotion of the first Christian congregation. It was, however, purely vocal.” – Dr. Frederic Louis Ritter.

“Only singing, however, and no playing of instruments was permitted in the early church.” – Hugo Leichtentritt.

“The music they used, reproduced the spirit of their religion – an inward quietude. All the music employed in their early services was vocal.” – F. L. Humphrey’s *Evolution of Church Music*.

“It (instrumental music) was only permitted to the Jews, as sacrifice was, for the heaviness and grossness of their souls. God condescended to their weakness, because

they were lately drawn off from idols; but now, instead of organs, we may use our own bodies to praise him withal. Instruments appertain not to Christians.” – John Chrysostom (345 – 407 A.D), Church Father, Eastern/Greek. (*Homily on Psalm 149 & Comments on Psalm 150*).

“Music in churches is as ancient as the apostles, but instrumental music not so.” – Joseph Bingham, *Works Vol. III, page 137*.

“The Christian community held the same view, as we know from the apostolic and post-apostolic literature: instrumental music was thought unfit for religious services; the Christian sources are quite outspoken in their condemnation of instrumental performances. Originally, only song was considered worthy of direct approach to Divinity.” – *The New Oxford History of Music (The Music of Post Biblical Judaism, Vol. I, Page 135)*.

“The general introduction of instrumental music can certainly not be assigned to an earlier date than the fifth century – the first organ is believed to have been used in church service in the thirteenth century. The early reformers, when they came out of Rome, removed them as monuments of idolatry.” – *McClintock and Strong’s Encyclopedia*.

“Pope Vitalian is related to have first introduced organs into some of the churches of western Europe about 670 A.D.” – *The American Encyclopedia, Vol. 12, page 688*.

“In the Greek (Catholic) Church the organ never came into use. But after the eighth century it became more and more common in the Latin Church, not, however, without opposition from the side of the monks. ... The Roman Catholic Church began adopting musical instruments during the Middle Ages, but the Greek church in the East continued to reject them; and even as late as the sixteenth century there was enough protest within the Roman church that the Council of Trent (1545) came very close to abolishing their use. Catholic churches finally began using instrumental music (usually an organ) during the Middle Ages, but it was largely opposed as unscriptural and was slow to gain acceptance. Not until the 1200’s could it be found in widespread use” – *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, Vol 2, page 1702*.

“The organ in the worship is the insignia of Baal. The Roman Catholics borrowed it from the Jews.” – Martin Luther (1483 – 1536 A.D.) [*McClintock & Strong’s Encyclopedia, Vol. I, page 762*].

“Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps, and the restoration of other shadows of the law.” – Presbyterian founder.

“Israel was at school and used childish things to help her to learn; but in these days when Jesus gives us spiritual food, one can make melody *without strings and pipes*. We do not need them. They would hinder rather than help our praise. Sing unto Him. This is the sweetest and best music. There is no instrument like the human voice. What a

degradation to supplant the intelligent song of the whole congregation by the blowing off of wind from inanimate bellows and pipes! We might as well pray by machinery as praise by it.” – Charles Spurgeon.

It is said that Spurgeon preached to 20,000 people every Sunday for 20 years in the Metropolitan Baptist Tabernacle and never were mechanical instruments of music used in his services. When asked why, he quoted 1 Cor. 14:15: “I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the understanding also; I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.” He then declared, “I would as soon pray to God with machinery as to sing to God with machinery.”

“I am an old minister and I here declare that I never knew them (musical instruments) to be productive of any good in the worship of God, and I have reason to believe they are productive of much evil. Music, as a science, I esteem and admire, but instrumental music in the house of God I abominate and abhor.” – Adam Clarke.

“... Those who know the church of God best, and what constitutes its genuine spiritual state, know that these things [mechanical instruments of music] have been introduced as a substitute for the life and power of religion; and that where they prevail most, there is least of the power of Christianity. Away with such portentous baubles from the worship of that infinite Spirit who requires His followers to worship Him in spirit and truth, for to no such worship are these instruments friendly.” – Adam Clarke, *Clarke’s Commentary, Vol. II, pp. 690-691.*

“I have no objection to instruments being in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen.” – John Wesley, 1729.

What Was the Teaching of the Pioneer “Evening Light” Ministers?

Question: “Is it right to have an organ or other instrumental music in church services?
 Answer: No. Jesus never introduced instrumental music into the worship of Christians. And the burden of the evening light is to bring the worship of God in every particular back to the standard Jesus lifted up. Appeals are often made by those who would justify the use of instruments in public [worship] to the various texts throughout the Old Testament, which speaks of the Jews worshipping God on various kinds of musical instruments. But let it be remembered, that although the Jews worshipped God upon instruments, such worship was no part of the original Levitical worship and was not commanded by Moses. Hence it appears that instrumental music in the Old as well as the New Testament does not properly belong to the public worship of God. We believe that musical instruments are alright in their place, but their place is outside of the public worship of the saints.” -- William G. Schell [songwriter, author, and co-laborer with D. S. Warner], *The Gospel Trumpet*, January 30, 1896, page 2, *Questions*.

“Having been a fond lover of instrumental music, I have always protested against the idea of abandoning our organ in the Missions. Many dear brethren have admonished me on the same, but I have resisted by quoting the Psalmist’s expressions on music, and felt it was not only right but [also] scriptural. But while in England, I came across this letter,

written by a godly man of his time, which I send to the *Trumpet*. After reading it I have become thoroughly convinced that we must worship God with our voices, and not with instruments; and I feel that the following will be a benefit to the rest of God's little ones. I thank God for the truth and light, and I shall never use an instrument in our worship again. This letter is copied from a book entitled 'Controversy of Zion,' by Dr. T. Christe:

“Things insignificant in themselves often involve great principles. Your correspondent at the little Independent Chapel at Parton thinks that matters there never looked so cheerful as at present, and amongst the sources of his joy he tells us, that on Sabbath last the notes of a *flutina-concertina* gave him great assistance in *making a joyful noise unto the Lord*. This is a melancholy admission, that the notes of a dead musical instrument, composed of wood and air, and elicited by the fingers of another, are needful to help his infirmities and teach his soul to worship the living God. But he goes further, and assuming that his flutina-concertina is of divine warranty, raises the whole question of instrumental music in Christian worship, as though it had never before been discussed, and wonders that any should be so insensate to melody, and so ignorant of scripture as to differ from him. He says, ‘It seems strange to us that David should say, *Praise the Lord with harp; sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument with ten strings; sing unto him a new song; play skillfully with a loud noise:* and that there should be those who object to the instrumental music in a place of worship.’

“Is the writer aware that this was precisely the position taken by Archbishop Land and the Star Chamber against the Puritans, Independents, etc., in the days of the first Charles, and in that fearful struggle for freedom of speech and of person which we now enjoy? Is he aware that a lawyer, a physician, and a minister – Burton, Prynne, and Bostwick – were seized and tried by that Romanizing prelate and that wicked tribunal for, amongst other things, their **exposal of the unscriptural character of church music?** ...

“ ‘I now condense a few thoughts on the scriptural view of the subject, and at once meet your correspondent's question by asking another – Would it seem strange to him if his new pastor slew bullocks and rams, sheep and oxen, turtle doves and pigeons, next Sabbath in the little chapel at Parton and then proceeded to sprinkle with blood, the book and the people, and the flutina-concertina, as well as to burn incense from his pulpit of wood? Yet this would be just as reasonably founded on the scripture he quotes as can the use of instruments of music in Christian worship.’” – Submitted by G. Tufts, Jr., Published in *The Gospel Trumpet*, November 25, 1897, page 2, under the heading, *Church Music*, (Abbreviated Quote).

Question: “Have we a right to worship with drums and horns? – W. H. C. Answer: No; it is not right to use drums or horns, or any other musical instrument in religious worship. The Jewish people used to blow horns sometimes in worship, but that is done away with the law of Moses. The use of musical instruments was never instituted by Christ, and never practiced by any of his apostles; hence forms no part of Christian worship. It belongs to the worship of formalists and is never used except where worship is drifting into formalism. It is the Spirit of God that puts the sweetness in our singing, and truly spiritual people want nothing but the Spirit of God to help them make a joyful

sound in singing the praises of God.” – William G. Schell, *The Gospel Trumpet*, September 15, 1898, page 5, *Questions Answered*.

Question: “Is it right to worship God with organ and choir? Did Jesus teach any such thing in the New Testament? Answer: No. Jesus never taught anything in favor of musical instruments and choir in divine worship. The entire New Testament is silent on this subject. Not one word indicates any mechanical worship in the church of God. The church is God’s organ; each individual member is a key; the Holy Spirit is the operator. When he touches a key it gives its individual and distinct sound, which blends in beautiful harmony and praise and true heart worship to God, expressed in inspired living words. Worshiping by machinery is certainly foreign to the church of God.” – J. W. Byers, *The Gospel Trumpet*, September 29, 1904, *Questions Answered*, pages 4 & 5.

“As concerning the use of musical instruments in our worship to God we have no quarrel or contention with anyone. It is the privilege of each one individually to come into that nearness to God where he can learn the secret of His mind concerning these things. It is down in the inner depths of the secret place of the Most High that we can know what pleases God. It is when we are tuned in perfectly with the heart of the Great Infinite that we can take such an attitude toward such things as He takes.

“No one can rightly object to me giving some of my own experience with respect to this matter in question. One evening years ago, when we were in intimate communion with God, we became so fully in the Spirit that we were lost to all earthly things. A sea of heavenly light rolled around me. Heaven was opened to the vision of my soul. I talked face to face with God. A text of scripture came to my heart, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” John 4:24. I knew this was true spiritual worship. In meditating on this afterward the thought came to my mind, “Would the soft tones of a musical instrument most skillfully played helped me to have worshiped God more fully in the Spirit?” No, a thousand times no! The most charming music ever rendered on any instrument would have been a distraction, a harsh, and hateful disturbance. Then God whispered to my heart, “I want the public worship of my holy ones to be as near like their most intimate private devotions as they can possibly have it.” It was then I knew that, if our public worship was in the Spirit as it should be, the most delightful instrumental music would be a hindrance instead of an aid to our worship.

“Is it wrong to have musical instruments in your home? Is it wrong to find pleasure in instrumental music? No! God has made us physical beings and gives us physical pleasures. He has made us mental beings and gives us intellectual delights. He has made us moral beings and gives us happiness in doing good, **but all this is not worship to God.** You can have physical pleasure, intellectual delights, moral happiness, and yet not worship God in the Spirit. In the realms of our intellectual tastes, and our finer artistic sensibilities we delight in beholding the beauty of sunset or the loveliness of flowers, but when we get in the Spirit and are given a vision of the wondrous perfections of God we do not want any bouquet of flowers to intercept our view.

“It is only human hearts that can pour music into the ears of God. The Holy Spirit never pours incense on the tones of the organ and wafts them up to the nostrils of the Almighty. **Heavenly incense is poured on nothing but the altar fires of God in the human soul.** Our singing may be out of time and out of tune, but if there is melody in the heart to God, it rolls in sweet symphonies throughout the corridors of heaven and angels listen. My dear holy brethren, let me whisper a secret to you. Artistic music only touches the finer tastes and higher sentimentality of our intellectual and moral being and never touches the spirit being of man. God is a spirit and it is only the Spirit of God that can touch and delight the spirit of man, and it is only the spirit of man that can touch and delight the heart of God. Spirit beings have no ear to hear sounds made by material things.” – C. E. Orr (Time and place of original publication unavailable).

D. S. Warner’s stance, as well as that of all the other pioneer “evening light” ministers on this subject, was nothing new but they were simply in keeping with the mainstream of fundamental Christianity. Other quotations from early *Gospel Trumpet* publications could be given, but these sufficiently reveal the *original stance* of the Church of God on this subject.

It should be remembered, however, that **it is not “a cappella” style music that brings the blessing of God. It is having our hearts so tuned with the Holy Spirit that we can truly “sing with the spirit and with the understanding also.”** Never forget the words of William Schell: “It is the Spirit of God that puts the sweetness in our singing, and truly spiritual people want nothing but the Spirit of God to help them make a joyful sound in singing the praises of God.”

– Harlan Sorrell