

REVIEW by Robert L. Dabney

Dr. Girardeau's "Instrumental Music in Public Worship."

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN THE PUBLIC WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH. *By John L. Girardeau, D. D., LL.D., Professor in Columbia Theological Seminary, South Carolina.* Richmond: Whittet & Shepperson. 1888. *The Presbyterian Quarterly*, July 1889.

The author in his eloquent conclusion anticipates that some will meet his arguments with sneers rather than serious discussion, which he proposes to endure with Christian composure. It is a reproach to our church, which fills us with grief, to find this prediction fulfilled in some quarters. Surely persons calling themselves Presbyterians should remember that the truths they profess to hold sacred have usually been in small minorities sneered at by the arrogant majorities. So it was in the days of the Reformers, of Athanasius, of the Apostles, and of Jesus himself.

The resort to this species of reply appears the more ill-considered, when we remember that Dr. Girardeau is supporting the identical position held by all the early fathers, by all the Presbyterian reformers, by a Chalmers, a Mason, a Breckinridge, a Thornwell, and by a Spurgeon. Why is not the position as respectable in our author as in all this noble galaxy of true Presbyterians? Will the innovators claim that all these great men are so inferior to themselves? The ideal seems to be that the opposition of all these great men to organs arose simply out of their ignorant old-fogyism and lack of culture; while our advocacy of the change is the result of our superior intelligence, learning and refinement. The ignorance of this overweening conceit makes it simply vulgar. These great men surpassed all who have succeeded them in elegant classical scholarship, in logical ability, and in theological learning. Their deprecators should know that they surpassed them just as far in all elegant culture. The era of the Reformation was the Augustan age of church art in architecture, painting and music. These reformed divines were graduates of the first Universities, most of them gentlemen by birth, many of them noblemen, denizens of courts, of elegant accomplishments and manners, not a few of them exquisite poets and musicians. But they unanimously rejected the Popish Church music; not because they were fusty old pedants without taste, but because a refined taste concurred with their learning and logic to condemn it.

Dr. Girardeau has defended the old usage of our church with a moral courage, loyalty to truth, clearness of reasoning and wealth of learning which should make every true Presbyterian proud of him, whether he adopts his conclusions or not. The framework of his arguments is this: it begins with that vital truth which no Presbyterian can discard without a square desertion of our principles. The man who contests this first premise had better set out at once for Rome: God is to be worshipped only in the ways appointed in his word. Every act of public cultus not positively enjoined by him is thereby forbidden. Christ and his apostles ordained the musical worship of the New Dispensation without any sort of musical instrument, enjoining only the

singing with the voice of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Hence such instruments are excluded from Christian worship. Such has been the creed of all churches, and in all ages, except of the Popish communion after it had reached the nadir of its corruption at the end of the thirteenth century, and of its prelatic imitators. But the pretext is raised that instrumental music was authorized by Scripture in the Old Testament. This evasion Dr. Girardeau ruins by showing that God set up in the Hebrew Church two distinct forms of worship; the one moral, didactic, spiritual and universal, and therefore perpetual in all places and ages that of the synagogues; the other peculiar, local, typical, foreshadowing in outward forms the more spiritual dispensation, and therefore destined to be utterly abrogated by Christ's coming. Now we find instrumental music, like human priests and their vestments, show-bread, incense, and bloody sacrifice, absolutely limited to this local and temporary worship. But the Christian churches were modeled upon the synagogues and inherited their form of government and worship because it was permanently didactic, moral and spiritual, and included nothing typical. This reply is impregably fortified by the word of God himself: that when the Antitype has come the types must be abolished. For as the temple-priests and animal sacrifices typified Christ and his sacrifice on Calvary, so the musical instruments of David in the temple-service only typified the joy of the Holy Ghost in his pentecostal effusions.

Hence when the advocates of innovation quote such words as those of the Psalmist, "Praise the Lord with the harp," etc., these shallow reasoners are reminded that the same sort of plea would draw back human priests and bloody sacrifices into our Christian churches. For these Psalms exclaim with the same emphasis, "Bind your sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar." Why do not our Christian æsthetics feel equally authorized and bound to build altars in front of their pulpits, and to drag the struggling lambs up their nicely carpeted aisles, and have their throats cut there for the edification of the refined audience? "Oh, the sacrifices, being types and peculiar to the temple service, were necessarily abolished by the coming of the Antitype." Very good. So were the horns, cymbals, harps and organs only peculiar to the temple-service, a part of its types, and so necessarily abolished when the temple was removed.

If any addition can be made to this perfectly compact argument, it is contained in this suggestion of an undoubted historical truth: that the temple-worship had a national theocratic quality about it, which cannot now be realized in Christ's purely spiritual kingdom. Israel was both a commonwealth and a church. Her political government was a theocracy. Her human king was the viceroy representing on earth her true sovereign, God. Hence, in the special acts of worship in the temple, in which the high priest, Messiah's type, and the king, God's viceroy, combined, they represented the State Church, the collective nation in a national act of homage. This species of worship could not lawfully exist except at one place; only one set of officials could celebrate it. It was representatively the nation's act. It is to be noted that, when at last musical instruments were attached to those national acts of homage to Israel's political king, Jehovah, it was not by the authority or intervention of the high priest, the religious head of the nation, but by that of the political viceroy. David's horns, harps and organs were therefore the appointed instruments of the national acts of homage to Jehovah. The church now is not a nation, but purely a spiritual kingdom, which is not of this world. Hence there is no longer room

in her worship for the horns, harps and organs, any more than for swords and stonings in her government, or human kings and high priests in her institutions.

Let the true inference from this partial use of instruments of music in the typical, national worship be fairly and perspicuously stated. It is but this: since God saw fit to ordain such an adjunct to divine worship for a special object, it proves the use of it not to be sin per se, like lying or theft, for a holy God would not ordain an unholy expedient for any object, however temporary. The same argument shows that incense, show-bread and bloody sacrifices in worship cannot be sin per se. But how far short is this admission from justifying the use of any of them in worship now? Just here is the pitiable confusion of thought. It is not enough for the advocate of a given member of the church's cultus to show that it is not essentially criminal. He must show that God ordained it positively for our dispensation.

Dr. Girardeau's opponents stubbornly forget that the burden of proof rests on them; he is not bound to prove that these instruments are per se criminal or that they are mischievous or dangerous, although he is abundantly able to prove the latter. It is they who must prove affirmatively that God has appointed and required their use in his New Testament worship, or they are transgressors. Doubtless the objection in every opponent's mind is this: That, after all, Dr. Girardeau is making a conscientious point on too trivial and non-essential a matter. I am not surprised to meet this impression in the popular mind, aware as I am that this age of universal education is really a very ignorant one. But it is a matter of grief to find ministers so oblivious of the first lessons of their church history. They seem totally blind to the historical fact that it was just thus every damnable corruption which has cursed the church took its beginning; in the addition to the modes of worship ordained by Christ for the New dispensation, of human devices, which seemed ever so pretty and appropriate, made by the best of men and women and ministers with the very best of motives, and borrowed mostly from the temple cultus of the Jews. Thus came vestments, pictures in churches, incense, the observances of the martyrs' anniversary days in a word, that whole apparatus of will-worship and superstition which bloomed into popery and idolatry. "Why, all these pretty inventions were innocent. The very best of people used them. They were so appropriate, so æsthetic! Where could the harm be?" History answers the question: They disobeyed God and introduced popery, a result quite unforeseen by the good souls who began the mischief! Yes, but those who have begun the parallel mischief in our Presbyterian Church cannot plead the same excuse, for they are forewarned by a tremendous history, and prefer Mrs. Grundy's taste to the convincing light of experience. [*Mrs. Grundy*, The surname of an imaginary personage who is proverbially referred to as a personification of the tyranny of social opinion in matters of conventional propriety. OED]

That a denomination, professing like ours to be anti-prelatic and anti-ritualistic, should throw down the bulwarks of their argument against these errors by this recent innovation appears little short of lunacy. Prelatists undertake every step of the argument which these Presbyterians use for their organ, and advance them in a parallel manner to defend the re-introduction of the Passover or Easter, of Whitsuntide, of human priests and priestly vestments, and of chrism, into the gospel church. "God's appointment of them in the Old Dispensation proves them to be

innocent. Christians have a right to add to the cultus ordained for the New Testament whatever they think appropriate, provided it is innocent; and especially are such additions lawful if borrowed from the Old Dispensation." I should like to see the Presbyterian who has refuted Dr. Girardeau in argument meet a prelatist, who justifies these other additions by that Presbyterian's own logic. Would not his consistency be something like that pictured by the old proverb of "Satan reproving sin"? Again, if the New Testament church has priests, these priests must have sacrifice. Thus, consistency will finally lead that Presbyterian to the real corporeal presence and the mass.

To rebut further the charge that Dr. Girardeau is stickling for an unimportant point, I shall now proceed to assert the prudential and the doctrino-psychological arguments against the present organ worship.

1st. Sound prudence and discretion decide against it. The money cost of these instruments, with the damaging debts incurred for them, is a sufficient objection. The money they cost, if expended in mission work, would do infinitely more good to souls and honor to God. In our poor church, how many congregations are there which are today mocking Dr. Craig with a merely nominal contribution to missions on the plea of an organ debt of \$1,800 to \$3,600! This latter says it is able to spare \$3,600 for a Christian's use (or does it propose to cheat the organ builder?). I ask solemnly, Is it right to expend so much of God's money, which is needed to rescue perishing souls, upon an object merely non-essential, at best only a luxury? Does the Christian conscience, in measuring the worth of souls and God's glory, deliberately prefer the little to the much?

Again, instruments in churches are integral parts of a system which is fruitful of choir quarrels and church feuds. How many pastoral relations have they helped to disrupt? They tend usually to choke congregational singing, and thus to rob the body of God's people of their God-given right to praise him in his sanctuary. They almost always help to foster anti-scriptural styles of church music, debauching to the taste, and obstructive, instead of assisting, to true devotional feelings. Whereas the advocates of organs usually defend them on grounds of musical culture and æsthetic refinement, I now attack them on those very grounds. I assert that the organ is peculiarly inimical to lyrical taste, good music, and every result which a cultivated taste pursues, apart from conscientious regard for God. The instrument, by its very structure, is incapable of adaptation to the true purposes of lyrical music. It cannot have any arsis or thesis, any rhythm or expression of emphasis, such as the pulsatile instruments have. Its tones are too loud, brassy and dominant; all syllabication is drowned. Thus the church music is degraded from that didactic, lyrical eloquence, which is its scriptural conception, to those senseless sounds expressly condemned by the apostle in 1 Corinthians 12-14. In truth, the selection of this particular instrument as the preferred accompaniment of our lyrical worship betrays artistic ignorance in Protestants, or else a species of superfluity of naughtiness in choosing precisely the instrument specially suited to popish worship.

It so happens that the artistic world has an amusement the Italian opera whose aim is very non-religious indeed, but whose art-theory and method are precisely the same with those of

scriptural church music. Both are strictly lyrical. The whole conception in each is this: to use articulate, rational words and sentences as vehicles for intelligible thoughts, by which the sentiments are to be affected, and to give them the aid of metre, rhythm and musical sounds to make the thoughts impressive. Therefore, all the world's artists select, for the opera-orchestras, only the pulsatile and chiefly the stringed instruments.

An organ has never been seen in a theater in Europe; only those instruments are admitted which can express arsis and thesis. I presume the proposal to introduce an organ into the Italian opera would be received by every musical artist in Europe as a piece of bad taste, which would produce a guffaw of contempt. This machine, thus fatally unfit for all the true purposes of musical worship and lyrical expression, has, indeed, a special adaptation to the idolatrous purposes of Rome, to which purposes all Protestants profess to be expressly hostile. So that, in selecting so regularly Rome's special instrument of idolatry, these Protestants either countenance their own enemies or betray an artistic ignorance positively vulgar. Consequently, one is not surprised to find this incorrect taste offending every cultivated Christian ear by every imaginable perversity, under the pretext of divine worship. The selections made are the most bizarre and unsuitable. The execution is over-loud, inarticulate, brassy, fitted only "to split the ears of the groundlings, capable, for the most part, of naught but inexplicable noise and dumb shows." The pious taste is outraged by the monopolizing of sacred time, and the indecent thrusting aside of God's holy worship to make room for "solos," which are unfit in composition, and still more so in execution, where the accompaniment is so hopelessly out of relation to the voice that if the one had the small-pox (as apparently it often has St. Vitus' dance) the other would be in no danger of catching the disease, and the words, probably senseless at best, are so mouthed as to convey no more ideas to the hearers than the noise of Chinese tom-toms. Worshippers of true taste and intelligence, who know what the finest music in Europe really is, are so wearied by these impertinences that they almost shiver at the thought of the infliction. The holy places of our God are practically turned into fifth-rate Sunday theaters.

I shall be reminded that there are some Presbyterian churches with organs where these abuses do not follow. "They need not follow in any." I reply that they are the customary result of the unscriptural plans. If there should be some sedate boys who are allowed to play with fire-arms, but do not shoo their little sisters through the brain, yet that result follows so often as to ground the rule that no parent should allow this species of plaything to his children. The innovation is in itself unhealthy; and hence, when committed to the management of young people, who have but a slim modicum of cultivation, such as prevails in this country at large, has a regular tendency to all these offensive abuses.

2nd. I find a still more serious objection to instrumental music in churches, when I connect the doctrine of God's word concerning worship with the facts of human psychology. Worship must be an act of *personal homage* to God, or it is a hypocrisy and offense. The rule is that we must "glorify God in our bodies and spirits, which are his." The whole human person, with all its faculties, appropriately takes part in this worship; for they are all redeemed by him and consecrated to him. Hence our voices should, at suitable times, accompany our minds and hearts. Again, all true worship is rational. The truth intelligently known and intelligibly uttered is

the only instrument and language of true worship. Hence all social public worship *must be didactic*. The apostle has settled this beyond possible dispute in 1st Corinthians. Speaking in an unknown tongue, when there is not one to interpret, he declares can have no possible religious use, except to be a testimony for converting pagan unbelievers. If none such are present, Paul expressly orders the speaker in unknown tongues *to be silent* in the congregations; and this although the speaker could correctly claim the *afflatus* of the Holy Ghost. This strict prohibition Paul grounds on the fact that such a tongue, even though a miraculous charism, was not an articulate vehicle of sanctifying truth. And, as though he designed to clinch the application of this rule upon these very instruments of music, he selects them as the illustration of what he means. I beg the reader to examine 1 Corinthians 14:7-9.

Once more: man's animal nature is sensitive, through the ear, to certain sensuous, æsthetic impressions from melody, harmony and rhythm. There is, on the one hand, a certain analogy between the sensuous excitements of the acoustic nerves and sensorium and the rational sensibilities of the soul. (It is precisely this psychologic fact which grounds the whole power and pleasure of lyrical compositions.) Now, the critical points are these: That, while these sensuous excitements are purely animal and are no more essentially promotive of faith, holiness, or light in the conscience than the quiver of the fox-hunting horses' ears at the sound of the bugle or the howl of the hound whelp at the sound of his master's piano, sinful men, fallen and blinded, are ever ready to abuse this faint analogy by mistaking the sensuous impressions for, and confounding them with, spiritual affections. Blinded men are ever prone to imagine that they have religious feelings, because they have sensuous, animal feelings, in accidental juxtaposition with religious places, words, or sights. This the pernicious mistake which has sealed up millions of self-deceived souls for hell.

Rome encourages the delusion continually. She does this with a certain consistency between her policy and her false creed. She holds that, no matter by what motive men are induced to receive her sacraments, these convey saving grace, *ex opere operato*. Hence she consistently seduces men, in every way she can, to receive her sacraments by any spectacular arts or sensuous thrills of harmony. Now, Protestants ought to know that (as the apostle says) there is no more spiritual affection in these excitements of the sensorium than in sounding brass or in tinkling cymbal.

Protestants cannot plead the miserable consistency of Rome in aiding men to befool themselves to their own perdition by these confusions, for they profess to reject all *opus operatum* effects of sacraments, and to recognize no other instrument of sanctification than the one Christ assigned, THE TRUTH. But these organ-grinding Protestant churches are aiding and encouraging tens of thousands of their members to adopt this pagan mistake. Like the besotted Papist, they are deluded into the fancy that their hearts are better because certain sensuous, animal emotions are aroused by a mechanical machine, in a place called a church, and in a proceeding called worship.

Here, then, is the *rationale* of God's policy in limiting his musical worship to melodies of the *human voice*. It is a faculty of the redeemed person, and not the noise of a dead machine. The

human voice, while it can produce melodious tones, can also articulate the words which are intelligible vehicles of divine truths. The hymns sung by the human voice can utter didactic truth with the impressiveness of right articulation and emphasis, and thus the pious singers can do what God commands teach one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. For his Christian church, the non-appointment of mechanical accompaniment *was its prohibition*. Time will prove, we fear by a second corruption of evangelical religion and by the ruin of myriads more of nominally Christian souls, how much wiser is the psychology of the Bible than that of Mrs. Grundy.

The reader has by this time seen that I ascribe this recent departure of our Presbyterian churches from the rule of their fathers in no degree to more liberal views or enlightened spirit. I know, by an intuition which I believe every sensible observer shares, that the innovation is merely the result of an advancing *wave of worldliness* and ritualism in the evangelical bodies. These Christians are not wiser but simply more flesh-pleasing and fashionable. That is exactly the dimension of the strange problem. Other ritualistic adjuncts concur from time to time. Nothing is needed but the lapse of years enough for this drift, of which this music is a part, to send back great masses of our people, a material well prepared for the delusion, into the bosom of Rome and her kindred connections.

This melancholy opinion is combined, in our minds, with a full belief in the piety, good intentions and general soundness of many ministers and laymen who are now aiding the innovations. No doubt the advocates of instrumental music regard this as the sting of Dr. Girardeau's argument, that it seems to claim all the fidelity and piety for the anti-organ party. No doubt many hearts are now exclaiming, "This unjust, and thousands of our saintliest women are in the organ loft; our soundest ministers have organs," etc., etc. All this is perfectly true. It simply means that the best of people err and unintentionally do mischief when they begin to lean to their own understandings. The first organ I ever knew of in a Virginian Presbyterian church was introduced by one of the wisest and most saintly of pastors, a paragon of old school doctrinal rigor. But he avowedly introduced it on an argument the most unsound and perilous possible for a good man to adopt that it would be advantageous to prevent his young people from leaving his church to run after the Episcopal organ in the city. Of course such an argument would equally justify every other sensational and spectacular adjunct to God's ordinances, which is not criminal *per se*. Now this father's general soundness prevented his carrying out the pernicious argument to other applications. A very bad organ remained the only unscriptural feature in a church otherwise well-ordered. But after the church authorizes such policy, what guarantee remains that one and another less sound and staid will not carry the improper principle to disastrous results? The conclusion of this matter is, then, that neither the piety nor the good intention of our respectable opponents is disparaged by us; but that the teachers and rulers of our church, learning from the great reformers and the warning lights of church history, should take the safer position alongside of Dr. Girardeau. Their united advice would easily and pleasantly lead back to the Bible ground all the zealous and pious laymen and the saintly ladies who have been misled by fashion and incipient ritualism.