

Silence of Scripture

Prohibitive or Permissive

Central to Much Division

- The basis upon which the “anti- / non-institutional” groups reject those who use silence to authorize
 - “Assembled” practices
 - Instrumental music
 - Gathering and then dividing into classes
 - Located preachers
 - Institutions
 - Orphans / Old-folks homes
 - Sponsoring church arrangements
 - Church supported colleges
 - Governance
 - City-, State-wide conferences

The History of the Concept

- Tertullian (ca. A.D. 150-222) early apologist
 - Spoke of those who contended that “the thing which is not forbidden is freely permitted.”
 - He replied: “I should rather say that what has not been freely allowed is forbidden”

Tertullian. 1995. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

The History of the Concept

- Martin Luther (1483-1546) primarily concerned with reforming faith not practice, dramatically changed his view of silence
 - Martin Luther initially wrote that “whatever is without the word of God is, by that very fact, against God.”
 - He frequently appealed to Deuteronomy 4:2: “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it.”
 - Later Luther wrote: “Nothing ought to be set up without scriptural authority, or *if it is* set up, it ought to be **esteemed free and not necessary**” (emphasis added).
 - Finally, he wrote: “What is not against Scripture is for Scripture, and Scripture for it” (Newman 1902, 308).

Newman, A. H. 1902. *A Manual of Church History*. Vol. 2. Chicago, IL: The American Baptist Publication Society.

The History of the Concept

- Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531) Swiss reformer
 - Zwingli believed that not only the faith but also the practice of the church had become corrupt, and therefore need to be restored
 - Viewed silence as prohibitive. He wrote that practices **“not enjoined or taught in the New Testament should be unconditionally rejected”**
 - Removed the statues, relics, pictures, altar equipment, priestly vestments, and audible music (**both instrumental and vocal**) from the church. He held that Christians were to **make melody “in their hearts” and not their mouths.**
 - Zwingli **stopped short on infant baptism.** (The relationship between church and state brought with it a relationship between citizenship and church membership, which made it difficult to postpone church membership waiting for an adult believer’s decision.)
- Newman, A. H. 1902. *A Manual of Church History*. Vol. 2. Chicago, IL: The American Baptist Publication Society.
- Allen and Hughes 1988. *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of the Churches of Christ*. Abilene Christian University Press

The History of the Concept

- Anabaptists
 - More strident in the view that silence is prohibitive
 - Challenged Zwingli on infant baptism
 - They were not concerned with the state since they were not a sanctioned church
 - Brought these views to America (here they are known as Amish and Mennonite groups)

The History of the Concept

- Puritans (1600's in America)
 - Silence is prohibitive
 - Influenced Baptists and Quakers (sometimes using imprisonment and public whippings)

The History of the Concept

- Sothern Baptists

- Silence is prohibitive

- [Regarding the SDC] *“nine Christian rites”: baptism, the Lord’s Supper, the love feast, the kiss of charity, anointing the sick, laying on of hands, dedicating of children, and the right hand of fellowship. They also appointed elders, deacons, and deaconesses, believing these offices to have precedents in the New Testament. Their writings were filled with appeals to **scriptural “precedent” and to the “primitive Christians.”** One writer claimed that, upon examination, people would find the Baptist Church “exactly corresponds with the rule and line of the Gospel in every part of it.”*

Discovering Our Roots — The Ancestry of the Churches of Christ

Important Ideas

- The absence of mention of a practice in scripture neither prohibits or permits intrinsically
- Silence becomes significant **only** when coupled with a revealed pattern – whether generic or specific

Examples Illustrate Complexity

Nadab and Abihu's "strange" or profane fire

- Leviticus 10:1-3

David's Temple

- II Samuel 7:1-7; I Kings 8:15-20
- Exodus 25:9 – 27:21