

## IS APPLAUSE APPROPRIATE IN WORSHIP?

**[Note:** This article was written a few years ago by a once-faithful brother. He wrote it before his apostasy and likely no longer believes its message. His apostasy does not diminish the truth of what he wrote, however. Please overlook some denominational jargon from the Lutheran source, Dub McClish]

The following remarks I found in a Lutheran publication written by John Brug, a professor at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Though Brug believes that the evidence indicates that applause is ultimately a matter of cultural judgment, it can not be successfully denied by those who claim to “do Bible things in Bible ways” that the following reasons ought to eliminate applause altogether.

**First**, Brug points out that:

“...we have traditionally regarded applause as the appropriate response to a performance, which may be judged by our subjective opinion, not to the preaching of God’s Word, which is not subject to our judgment. We don’t customarily applaud the condemnation heaped on us by God’s law [and] we don’t cheer...or give a standing ovation to the Lord’s Supper, though we fully approve of their content. We don’t usually interrupt the sermon with applause when we like its content or style.”

**Second**, Brug asks why we don’t applaud the “biting condemnations of God’s law” when they are preached? These are as much part of God’s Word which should be “celebrated” as the rest. The absence of cheering when hearing criticisms from God indicates that the “cultural excuse” offered for cheering it “celebrates” God’s Word--is merely an afterthought. People have no real reason for clapping in worship other than that they are being pushed around by cultural currents which turn worship into performance-oriented acting instead of bowing before God’s throne.

**Third**, clapping or cheering indicates that worship has indeed turned into “drama performances” designed to stimulate audiences rather than sincerely offering to God our hearts.

“If the music and drama in the church are intended to present the Word rather than perform a show, it would seem most appropriate that we respond to them as we would to any other presentation of the gospel... just as wedding bulletins often ask guests to refrain from flash photography to preserve an atmosphere of worship.”

The fact is, applause is usually offered during certain selections of worship that more nearly lend themselves to performance perversions than devotion. This alone indicates that cheering, since it is not offered during “all” the acts of worship, is a cultural peculiarity that only now scrambles for justification.

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**Fourth**, Brug wrote:

Another consideration is that people who experience the concert or drama as worship and as an occasion for meditation consider applause a disruption of the mood and spirit of worship. A glorious anthem takes our minds soaring to a contemplation of heaven, but jarring applause brings us crashing down to the earth.

**Fifth**, “mingling worship and applause also creates practical difficulties. If worship is treated like performance,” why do we “withhold applause when beautiful truths of the Word are presented in less than elegant style or when the content doesn’t appeal to us?” Once more, this question, considered rightly, shows that the real purpose of applause is to uphold the messenger of the “people’s choice” - not God’s Word. When preachers begin to succumb to the “peoples choice” award instead of the approval of God, there is something certainly gone awry. “We teach [preachers] that the goal of good preaching is to direct attention and honor to the message, not to the human messenger or his eloquence.

**Sixth**, the most important consideration is that applause is without New Testament authority. Christians ought to abstain from applauding in worship.