

When In Church, Please Hold Your Applause

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Dear Miss Manners: At my church, the congregation occasionally applauds following a particularly well-performed hymn or solo, but my mother says that she had always been told that applause was never to be given in church, excepting the times when small children sang on special occasions. When, if ever, is applause appropriate during the worship service?

I have also noticed that half of the congregation bows their heads during the benediction, while the other half looks back at the pastor as he speaks.

Gentle Reader: All this is because the only public event anybody recognizes anymore is entertainment. Having forgotten church manners, people are substituting those that would be proper for a performance.

This drives Miss Manners wild. Hard as it may be to imagine, musicians in church are supposed to play or sing for the glory of God, not the pleasure of the congregation (whom people increasingly slip and call "the audience").

Therefore, there should be no applause in church. Not even for small children, who particularly need to have the purpose explained to them. (However, Miss Manners is not so hard-hearted as to disbar smiles, particularly parental ones, that signal "You did splendidly," and favorable remarks after the services.)

Similarly, the pastor, although he addresses the congregation, is doing so to instruct them, rather than to amuse them. Looking at him means one is attending to his words, but keeping the head bowed reverently may signal that as well-provided the head does not keep hitting the chest and having to be jerked up.

Feeling incorrect? Address your etiquette questions to Miss Manners, in care of the Chicago Tribune, 435 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill., 60611.