

Joe Morecraft III's View of Instrumental Music in Public Worship: A Biblical Analysis

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In the modern era of the so-called “worship wars,” there have been basically four views on worship among professing “conservative” Presbyterians. One view that has grown in popularity in recent years is that the Reformed doctrine of worship called the regulative principle of worship is false and that we can do anything we want as long as it does not explicitly contradict Scripture. This is essentially the view of James Jordan, Steven Schlissel, Peter Leithart, John Frame,¹ and Doug Wilson. These men are clearly on the road toward Rome and their worship practices prove it.

Another view, which is the most popular among conservative Presbyterians, is that the regulative principle is indeed true but it basically can be *completely ignored* without offending God. This is the view of the OPC, PCA, and the vast majority of Reformed communions today. These bodies have the regulative principle in their subordinate, yet turn around and allow virtually every innovation under the sun (e.g., the “sacred” calendar, high church liturgies, liturgical dance, drama groups, musical instruments, performances and soloists, and so on). Their worship is no different than what takes place in evangelical churches that reject the regulative principle. They give lip service to the Scriptures, the Confession of Faith, and Larger Catechism but deny what they profess by their actions. They really do not believe in Reformed worship and are more interested in protecting the status quo than upholding purity of worship.²

A third view is that of the original Presbyterians in Scotland. They not only believed in *sola*

¹ John Frame says that he believes the regulative principle but so explicitly redefines and repudiates it in his book, *Worship in Spirit and Truth: A Refreshing Study of the Principles and Practice of Biblical Worship*, that he belongs in the James Jordan Romanizing camp. For proof of this assertion, see Brian M. Schwertley's *The Neo-Presbyterian Challenge to Confession Presbyterian Orthodoxy: A Biblical Analysis of John Frame's Worship in Spirit and in Truth* at http://www.reformedonline.com/uploads/1/5/0/3/15030584/frame_on_worship.pdf.

² Michael Bushell's analysis of what happened to American Presbyterian regarding the crucial sphere of worship is noteworthy: “Under the pietistic and humanistic influences attending and following the Great Awakening, the American Presbyterian Church eventually came to the conclusion that the peace of the church was best to be served by allowing considerable diversity in the worship practices of the church under its care. The worship practice of the Presbyterian church was, in effect, cut loose from the bonds of Scripture and allowed to run its own course. It was this situation as much as anything else that led eventually to the Presbyterian church's defection to Modernism. If a church will not keep its worship pure and biblical, if it will not jealously guard its own practice when its people come before God in self-conscious praise and adoration, then it is not to be expected that it will long maintain its doctrinal purity. It is no small wonder that men have so little respect intellectually for the Scripture when daily they ignore their clear commands concerning how their Author is to be worshiped. The worship of the Presbyterian church in this country is dictated now largely by the demands of convenience, not the demands of Scripture, and there is no basic difference between liberal and evangelical churches on this score, not at least as regards outward form. To our brethren in the various Reformed communions who would disagree with this, we would ask this simple question: ‘If the regulative principle were not taught in the Scriptures, what difference would it make in your worship?’ The answer in most cases would have to be, ‘very little.’ We would also ask our brethren whether they have sought self-consciously to apply the regulative principle to their worship practice. We have a suspicion that most of the people in our Reformed churches have never even heard of the regulative principle, much less sought to apply it. Our Reformed churches have inherited a pattern of thinking which will countenance virtually any practice in worship as long as it does not offend the wrong people. These are harsh words, but we are fully convinced that they are accurate” (*The Songs of Zion: A Contemporary Case for Exclusive Psalmody* [Pittsburgh, PA: Crown and Covenant, 1980, 93], 210-211).

Scriptura as it applied to worship but were *strict* and *consistent* in its application. This resulted in the rejection of pagan/papal holy days (which obviously have not been commanded in God's Word) and the adoption of exclusive psalmody without musical accompaniment. This position, which is the view of Scripture and the Westminster Standards, will be defended in this brief monograph.³

The fourth view (which is the view that will be critiqued in this study) is one which holds strictly to the regulative principle but which, due to a love of human traditions or simply a Scriptural blind spot, holds to some very inconsistent practices. This position which is contrary to the original Westminster Standards would be considered the *strict view* in the PCA and OPC. While it is far better in practice than churches with liturgical dancers, drama groups, and rock bands, it historically has led to the very lax, completely non-Reformed view that has come to dominate the OPC, PCA, and many other Reformed communions today. A small hole in the dike will only remain small for a rather short period of time. When exceptions to the regulative principle are made either due to a love of human traditions or a wrong exegesis of Scripture, it is only a matter of time before biblical worship is corrupted with a whole assortment of human innovations. These innovations over time become loved traditions and thus become thoroughly entrenched corruptions. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. If we do not draw the line where God draws the line, then the line will be redrawn according to man's will, not God's. All of this explains why the worship in many Reformed churches today has more in common with the Assemblies of God than the Westminster Standards.

Morecraft holds to this fourth view and skillfully defends it. Therefore, a careful examination of his arguments in favor of certain non-confessional worship practices is in order. I have chosen to critique and analyze Joe Morecraft's arguments for a number of reasons. (1) His book on worship is the very best of those offered by churchmen who are *not* a cappella exclusive Psalm singers; (2) He is deservedly known as one of the best and most scholarly preachers in the United States; (3) He holds strongly to the inspiration and authority of Scripture as well as *sola Scriptura*. Therefore, our differences are exegetically based. They are *not* rooted in fundamental or presuppositional differences. (4) Morecraft is an influential voice in the part of the Christian reconstruction movement that is sane, sound, exegetical, Presbyterian, and committed to justification by faith alone and the Protestant Reformation. It is my view that a thorough Christian reconstruction of society is dependent on a reformation in biblical worship or first table law issues. Therefore, discussions and debates on worship are necessary and productive.

Joe Morecraft on Musical Instruments in Public Worship

In Morecraft's chapter entitled "Musical Instruments and the Worship of God," he sets forth his main argument for the use of musical instruments in public worship followed by four reasons why God wants us to use musical instruments. We will consider the main argument first and then analyze the subordinate arguments.

Morecraft begins the chapter on instruments by quoting Psalm 150: "Praise the LORD! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty firmament! Praise Him for His mighty acts; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness! Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; Praise Him with the lute and harp! Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with clashing cymbals! Let everything that has

³ Proof of this assertion regarding the Westminster Standards can be found in Brian M. Schwertley's *Sola Scriptura and the Regulative Principle of Worship* (Southfield, MI: Reformed Witness, 1999), 180-192. Available at http://www.reformedonline.com/uploads/1/5/0/3/15030584/sola_scriptura_and_the_regulative_principle_of_worship.pdf

breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!” (Ps. 150:1-6). Then he writes,

Why do we use musical instruments in the worship of God? Should we use musical instruments in the worship of God? For most Christians today the answer to these questions is so obvious, that they need not even be asked. They help us worship God! But, how do we know that they help us worship God? Is this wishful thinking?

These questions are necessary ones because we may worship God only as He has commanded in His Word, with no additions or subtractions (Deut. 12:32). We may not do in worship anything He has not commanded. Furthermore, nothing helps us worship God but what He has commanded and instituted in the Bible. Everything man invents for whatever reason is a hindrance to worship and has the opposite effect—it encourages the worship of the human will, which is the source of any man-made additions to worship (Col. 2:16-23).

Why *do* we use musical instruments in the worship of God? Answer: God has commanded us to do so in the Bible, in such places as Psalm 150. In this psalm we are commanded to praise God for His excellent greatness in His sanctuary with every musical instrument suitable for worship.⁴

Morecraft (who takes the Regulative Principle seriously) is wise to appeal to various Old Testament passages that speak of the use of musical instruments for the only possible biblical evidence for their use in public worship is found in the Old Testament (the *apocalyptic* description of instruments *in heaven* in the book of Revelation will be dealt with below). Excepting apocalyptic symbols that are clearly not meant to be taken literally, the New Testament teaches that we are to praise God with the fruit of our lips (Heb. 13:15). What then are we to do with passages such as Psalm 150? Is it not obvious that God commands us to praise Him with a variety of instruments?

To those who read their Bibles superficially it does seem obvious. But if we faithfully employ biblical procedures of interpretation, we will see that such arguments are fallacious. Whenever we interpret a section of Scripture, one of our first questions must be: What did this passage mean to the *original audience*? Did the Jews view such passages as authorizing any member of the covenant community to play an instrument in public worship if they were gifted and wanted to help out? The answer is an emphatic – no! They did not interpret such passages in the same manner as Joe Morecraft.

The reason for this is quite simple. The faithful Jews understood that the Scriptures clearly tell us that God introduced musical instruments at a *specific time* and for a *specific purpose* and that only priests and Levites were *authorized* to play *specific instruments*. What this means is that the use of musical instruments is not something indifferent (*adiaphora*). It is not up to men to decide *when* instruments can be used in worship for God has explicitly revealed His will on this matter. The church does not have the authority to decide *who* can play instruments since in the Old Covenant church only certain families among the Levites were allowed to play what God had authorized them to play.

If the Jews believed the same things about instruments in public worship as most professing Christians do today, then they *would not have waited* for a specific command from God but would have used a whole variety of instruments and would have allowed any skillful player to play in public worship. But we know that that did not occur. The Jews only began using instruments in public worship when God through David and other prophets in David’s time introduced them. This point is proved by a number of passages. “And he [King Hezekiah] stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, of Gad the king’s seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for thus was the commandment of the LORD by his prophets” (2 Chronicles 29:25). Note that God Himself introduced these instruments. Two silver

⁴ Joe Morecraft III, *How God Wants Us to Worship Him: A Defense of the Bible as the Only Standard for Modern Worship* (San Antonio, TX: Vision Forum, 2004), 139-140.

trumpets were introduced by God in the days of Moses (Num. 10:1-10). From Abel to Moses, there were no musical instruments used in public worship. From Moses to David, there were only two silver trumpets. These trumpets did not accompany the singing but were blown during the sacrifice. From David onward, the trumpets were played conjointly with the other instruments as employed by the Levites.

The Bible teaches that this introduction was part of the system of Temple worship: “The David gave his son Solomon the plans for the vestibule, its houses, its treasuries, its upper chambers, its inner chambers, and the place of the mercy seat; and the plans for all that he had, he had by the Spirit, of the courts of the house of the LORD, of all the chambers all around, of the treasuries of the house of God, and of the treasuries for the dedicated things, also for the division of the priests and Levites, for all the work of the service of the house of the LORD. ‘All this,’ said David, ‘the LORD made me understand in writing, by His hand upon me, all the works of these plans’” (1 Chron. 28:11-13, 19). The Holy Scriptures emphasize that David received the plans, divisions, and assignments relating to the temple by divine inspiration.⁵ Nothing relating to the temple and its worship originated in man’s imagination.

Whenever new worship practices were introduced, God made it very clear that He – not man – was the source of the new additions. Thus, when additions were made under the administration of Moses, we are explicitly told that these additions came by way of divine inspiration (Ex. 25:9, 40; 27:8). The additions that came under the reign of King David also came by way of divine revelation.⁶ The system of temple worship set up by God during David’s reign receives no additions or alterations until the death of Christ and the inauguration of the New Covenant administration of the Covenant of Grace.

This raises a question. If an Israelite farmer was skilled at playing an instruments, could he have played during public worship? No. He could not have unless he was a Levite of a specific family. Moreover, if he was, he could only play *at the temple*. What if an elder in the gate had a wife who was an accomplished musician? Could she have played during public worship? No. She could not have. There were no women Levites allowed to serve in the temple. Note once again, one had to be a Levite of a specific family to play an instrument. Therefore, those who appeal to Psalm 150 and similar passages are either ignorant of Scripture or are being disingenuous. When a pastor’s wife plays the piano or an elder’s son plays the guitar in public worship, they are doing something *not authorized in Scripture*. If Psalm 150 authorized Pastor Bob’s wife to play the piano or Billy Joe’s cousin to play the

⁵ As Moses received the pattern of the tabernacle and its vessels by divine inspiration (Ex. 25:9, 40; 27:8), so the chronicler, while giving David credit for preparing the plans for the Temple, declares that Yahweh was the source of David’s knowledge. “The hand of Yahweh upon...” is a frequent expression for divine inspiration (cf. 2 Kings 3:15; Ex. 1:3; 3:14, etc.)” (Edward Lewis Curtis and Albert Alonzo Madsen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Chronicles* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976 (1910)], 229).

⁶ “This way of praising God by musical instruments had not hitherto been in use. But David, being a prophet, instituted it by divine direction, and added it to the other carnal ordinances of that dispensation, as the apostle calls them (cf. Heb. 9:10). The New Testament keeps up singing of psalms, but has not appointed church music” (Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* [T&T Clark], Vol. 2, 875). Keil and Delitzsch concur, “The Levites were appointed to sing, ‘according to the command of David,’ but this command was by interposition of Jahve, viz. Given by His prophets” (*Commentary on the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980] 3 [part 2]:451). John Gill agrees, “This sort of music was not commanded by the law of Moses, but was directed to by David under a divine influence, and was approved of by the prophets of the Lord here mentioned” (*An Exposition of the Old Testament* [Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, [1810] 1979], 3:86). The great American puritan Cotton Mather writes, “The instrumental musick used of the church of Israel was an institution of God: it was (2 Chron. 16:42) the commandment of the Lord ‘by the prophets.’ And the instruments are called ‘God’s instruments’ (1 Chron. 16:42) and ‘instruments of the Lord’ (2 Chron. 7:6).” It is important that we keep in mind that David’s command was not the *arbitrary act* of a king or simply an expression of his *own personal desires*. He was acting on God’s instruction by both a work of the Holy Spirit on himself as well as the direct work of other prophets.

guitar then it also authorized non-Levites among Israel, whether male or female, to play any instruments they desired. But we know from several Old Testament passages and church history (see below) that that was not the case. It is irresponsible exegetically to take a very narrow, specific command that only applied to priests and certain Levitical families in ceremonial actions and apply them to the completely different use of instruments today.

If we really take the regulative principle seriously then we must allow the specific details surrounding the introduction and use of musical instruments (i.e., the what, the why, the who, and the when of the use of instruments in public worship) to inform our modern application of such passages as Psalm 150. Note that instruments in public worship were never treated by God or His faithful people as matters of *adiaphora*, or as things decided upon by human autonomy. A brief overview of their use ought to clarify our understanding of Psalm 150.

The Holy Spirit added musical instruments under David in anticipation of the ceremonial, glorious worship of the temple. In 1 Chronicles 16:4-6 we read, “So they brought the ark of God and set it in the midst of the tabernacle that David had erected for it. Then they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before God. And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD. Then he distributed to everyone of Israel, both man and woman, to everyone a loaf of bread, a piece of meat, and a cake of raisins. And he appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, to commemorate, to thank, and to praise the LORD God of Israel: Asaph the chief, and next to him Zechariah, then Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, and Obed-Edom: Jeiel with stringed instruments and harps, but Asaph made music with cymbals; Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests regularly blew the trumpets before the ark of the covenant of God.”

Note that only Levites were appointed to play the instruments and they did so before the ark of the LORD. Asaph could play the cymbals but was not authorized to play stringed instruments. This initial setting apart is expanded and made more specific in 1 Chronicles 25:1-8: “Moreover David and the captains of the army separated for the service some of the sons of Asaph, of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, stringed instruments, and cymbals. And the number of the skilled men performing their service was: Of the sons of Asaph: Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah, and Asharelah; the sons of Asaph were under the direction of Asaph, who prophesied according to the order of the king. Of Jeduthun, the sons of Jeduthun: Gedaliah, Zeri, Jeshaiiah, Shimei, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah, six under the direction of their father Jeduthun, who prophesied with a harp to give thanks and to praise the LORD. Of Heman, the sons of Heman: Bukkiah, Mattaniah, Uzziel, Shebuel, Jerimoth, Hananiah, Hanani, Eliathah, Giddalti, Romamti-Ezer, Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir, and Mahazioth. All these were the sons of Heman the king’s seer in the words of God, to exalt his horn. For God gave Heman fourteen sons and three daughters. All these were under the direction of their father for the music in the house of the LORD, with cymbals, stringed instruments, and harps, for the service of the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman were under the authority of the king. So the number of them, with their brethren who were instructed in the songs of the LORD, all who were skillful, was two hundred and eighty-eight.”

All these Levites had specific musical duties in the house of the LORD – the temple (see 1 Chron. 23:1-5). In 1 Chronicles 28:13, we see once again that the division of the priests and Levites was for all the work of “the service of the house of God.” In 2 Chronicles 29:25-28, we learn that *several generations after David* the exact same Levitical families were in charge of playing *the exact same instruments*. In other words, the use of instruments was restricted to certain family lines within the Levitical priesthood. These families only played during the worship of the temple. They played until “the burnt offering was finished” (2 Chron. 29:28). Note that they did not play Egyptian, Hittite or Canaanite instruments but only instruments designed by King David under divine inspiration. In Ezra

3:10, over 400 years after the death of King David, we find the same Levitical families playing the same instruments: “When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel.” Remember that Asaph was given the task of using the cymbals back in 1 Chronicles 16:5.⁷

The fact that only priests and Levites could play certain instruments authorized by God as well as the reality that their use was *always connected* to the temple, sacrifices, and the ark of the covenant, demonstrates that musical instruments served a ceremonial/typological function.

Since the New Testament teaches that all the ceremonial aspects of temple worship have been abolished, the passages that speak of the use of musical instruments in public worship under the Old Covenant do *not* provide biblical warrant for the use of musical instruments in public worship today. Jesus Christ rendered the whole ceremonial Levitical system obsolete with the perfect sacrifice of Himself on the cross (cf. Heb. 7:27; 9:28); the inferior (Heb. 9:11-15), the shadow (Heb. 10:1; 8:4-5), the obsolete (Heb. 8:13), the symbolic (Heb. 9:9), and the ineffectual (Heb. 10:4) have been replaced by Jesus Christ and His work. Christians have no more business using musical instruments in public worship than using priestly vestments, candles, incense, altars, and a sacerdotal priesthood. Roman Catholics are simply being consistent when they incorporate all the abrogated “shadows” into their system of worship. Girardeau writes:

Those who have most urgently insisted upon it [musical instruments in public worship] have acted with logical consistency in importing priests into the New Testament church; and as priests suppose sacrifices, lo, the sacrifice of the Mass! Instrumental music may not seem to stand upon the same foot with that monstrous corruption, but the principle which underlies both is the same; and *that* whether we are content with a single instrument, the cornet, the bass-viol, the organ, or go on by a natural development to the orchestral art, the cathedral pomps, and all the spectacular magnificence of Rome. We are Christians, and we are untrue to Christ and to the Spirit of grace when we resort to the abrogated and forbidden ritual of the Jewish temple.⁸

Morecraft rejects this position and offers a number of reasons why. First, he notes that not all aspects of the worship of the temple were ceremonial. He writes,

A closer look at this belief reveals several problems. One difficulty is that in the temple worship of the Old Testament, there were not only ceremonial elements, but also non-ceremonial elements that should always be included in the worship of God, such as prayer and praise. Just because one aspect of Old

⁷ Instrumental music by priests and Levites was a constituted element of the worship of the temple (and *only of the temple*) by David’s inspired command. In 2 Chronicles 8:14, we read, “And, according to the order of David his father, [Solomon] appointed the division of the priests for their service, the Levites for their duties (to praise and serve before the priests) as the duty of each day required, and the gatekeepers by their divisions at each gate; for so David the man of God had commanded.” During the reformation of worship under Jehoiada the high priest (around 5 generations later), the divine authorization of the temple worship was emphasized, “Also Jehoiada appointed the oversight of the house of the LORD to the hand of the priests, the Levites, whom David had assigned in the house of the LORD, to offer the burnt offerings of the LORD, as it is written in the Law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, as it was established by David” (2 Chron. 23:18). Christians have no more right to change the *who* (priests and Levites) and the *what* (specific instruments) than the Jews could change aspects of the sacrifices. The authorized instruments were the *kinnor* (translated as “harp” [KJV, NKJV, NEB]), a ten stringed instrument) and the *nebel* (translated as “harp” [NIV, RSV], “lute” [RSV, NEB, KJV, NKJV], “psaltery” [KJV], and “viol” [KJV] which also likely had ten strings, see the Hebrew of Ps. 33:2; 144:9). These instruments were more like a modern harpsichord than a guitar.

⁸ John L. Girardeau, *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church* (Havertown, PA: New Covenant Pub. [1888], 1983), 79.

Testament worship has ceased to be applicable should we conclude that every aspect of Old Testament worship is inapplicable? Prayer and praise continue to be important elements of Christian worship. Although these were elements in temple worship, they did not cease when Christ brought the ceremonies of the temple to an end.⁹

Regarding this point, we make the following observations. (1) No one argues that everything that occurred at the temple was ceremonial. Presbyterians have always acknowledged that Bible reading, exposition, as well as prayer, and praise have never been ceremonial. The issue is: Why are some things such as the use of incense, priestly garments, the sacrificing of animals, and musical instruments identified as ceremonial and other things such as prayer and praise with singing regarded as non-ceremonial? Some things such as blood sacrifices are easy to identify as ceremonial for the New Testament explicitly tells us that they were shadows replaced by Christ. Other things such as incense, priestly garments, and musical instruments are determine to be ceremonial and temporary by logical deduction. Prayer and the singing of praise were things that were not only practiced outside of the tabernacle and temple (i.e., they were done in synagogues, homes, and in private worship) but were also practiced by everyone (i.e., including non-priests and non-Levites). In addition, they are still practiced by all Christians in the New Covenant Scriptures. The fact that musical instruments and incense were restricted to the temple complex and were only used by priests or Levites indicates a ceremonial or restricted use. Those who appeal to the ceremonial use of instruments in the Old Testament for their authorization today must deliberately ignore the *biblical specifics* as to who (priests and Levites), what (*kinnor*, *nebel*, and cymbals), where (the temple complex), and when (during the sacrifice) instruments in public worship were commanded. If we can use instruments, then why not incense and priestly garments?

(2) It is an established fact of history that the Jews did not use musical instruments in public worship outside of the temple system. They understood that the priestly and Levitical use of instruments was connected to the sacrificial system of the temple. Girardeau writes,

In his great work *On the Ancient Synagogue*, Vtringa shows that there were only two instruments of sound used in connection with the synagogue, and that these were employed, not in worship or along with it as an accomplishment, but as *publishing signals*- first, for proclaiming the new year; secondly, for announcing the beginning of the Sabbath; thirdly, for publishing the sentence of excommunication; and fourthly, for heralding feasts. There were no sacrifices over which they were to be blown, as in the tabernacle and temple. And from the nature of the instruments it is plain that they could not have accompanied the voice in singing. They were only of two kinds – trumpets (*tubae*), and ram's horns or cornets (*buccinae*). It had but one note, and was so easy to blow that a child could sound it. Further, they were, for the most part, used not even in connection with the synagogue buildings, but were blown from the roofs of houses, so as to be heard at a distance.¹⁰

If Morecraft's view was true, one should expect to see the use of musical instruments in Jewish synagogues from at least the time of David to the present. But this is not the case. Instrumental music was not introduced into synagogue worship until the early nineteenth century and it was only used by the more liberal syncretistic Jewish communions. M.C. Ramsey writes,

...the following statement of Rabbi R. Brasch of Sydney should prove helpful. 'There are no definite records as to the actual introduction of instrumental music into the synagogue until 1810, when Reform

⁹ Joe Morecraft III, *How God Wants Us to Worship Him*, 143-144.

¹⁰ John. L. Girardeau, *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church*, 39-40.

Temples in Germany did so for the first time...In the present-day world, orthodox synagogues still abstain from instrumental music...but every Liberal and Reform Temple accompany the congregational singing and the choir on an organ.’ It is both interesting and informative to notice that the instruments of music were first used in synagogues at the beginning of the nineteenth century, that is, about the same time as they began to be introduced into Protestant [i.e., Presbyterian] churches.¹¹

After the temple was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70, the priestly-Levitical use of instruments vanished from the face of the earth. When the synergistic-liberal Jews introduced instrumental music in the early nineteenth century, they gave an illuminating justification for this innovation. They argued that since the temple no longer exists, God accepts the prayers of His people as a sacrifice – as atonement. If contrite prayers and confessions of sin now function in the place of blood sacrifices then music should accompany prayer just as it accompanied sacrifices. Although this argument is unscriptural and rooted in Pharisaical legalism, it at least recognizes the connection between instrumental music and the sacrificial cultus. The more strict Jews (e.g., “orthodox” Jews) still do not use musical instruments in their worship because they recognize that it was restricted to the Levitical, temple system of worship.

Morecraft must also explain why the post-apostolic churches of both the east and west *did not use musical instruments in public worship*. If we assume that Morecraft’s position is correct, then the Jewish synagogues (which correspond to New Covenant Christian congregations) would have employed various instruments in congregational singing. The Christian churches in their worship would have imitated this worship just as they adopted prayer, Psalm singing, the reading the Scriptures, and the exposition of the Scriptures. “The most important legacy of the first century synagogue was the form and organization of the apostolic church.”¹² “The elements of public worship actually enumerated in the New Testament are precisely those which existed in the synagogue. As then, the use of musical instruments was unknown in the worship of the synagogue it was not introduced into the Christian church.”¹³ We must keep in mind that synagogues could be found in Jewish communities throughout Judea and in Persia, Greece, Asia Minor, and Italy. There were over four hundred and fifty synagogues in and around Jerusalem alone.¹⁴ The apostles and first evangelists grew up attending these synagogues. If the synagogues used instruments, the lack of instruments in Christian congregations is inexplicable. Someone, such as James Jordan, could argue that the post-apostolic fathers were influenced by neo-platonism and thus were attracted to “minimalist” worship. The problem with this argument is that some of the fathers were strongly against Greek philosophy. *None* of the church fathers approved of instruments. The excellent scholar James McKinnon writes, “The antagonism which the Fathers of the early church displayed toward instruments has two outstanding characteristics: vehemence and

¹¹ M.C. Ramsay, *Purity of Worship* (Presbyterian Church of East Australia, 1968), 12.

¹² W. White Jr., “Synagogue” in Gen Ed Merrill Terry, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, 76), 69.

¹³ Girardeau, 102.

¹⁴ According to the Talmud there were 480 synagogues in Jerusalem at the time of the destruction of the second temple (A.D. 70). If women and children are factored in, there were probably over 15,000 converts in Jerusalem within a few weeks after Pentecost. However, most of the converts in Jerusalem would soon be dispersed by a severe Jewish persecution of Christian. “The term ‘synagogue’ is used in the gospels over thirty times while an even greater frequency appears in Acts. It is assumed in both the Talmudic literature and the N.T. That this was the valid leadership and execution of Judaism, no matter whether it was in Jerusalem or in Corinth” (W. White Jr., 5:556). Although the beginning of synagogue worship is shrouded in mystery, the fact that Jesus Christ and the apostles worshiped in various synagogues and even expounded the word in them proves that God recognized their legitimacy (i.e. they had divine warrant).

uniformity.”¹⁵

McClintock and Strong concur, “Students of ecclesiastical archaeology are generally agreed that instrumental music was not used in churches till a much later date; for Thomas Aquinas, A.D. 1250, has these remarkable words: ‘Our Church does not use musical instruments, as harps and psalteries, to praise God withal, that she may not seem to Judaize.’”¹⁶ This statement clearly indicates that musical instruments were not used in public worship during Aquinas’ time. This is an amazing fact that must not be overlooked, especially when we consider how human traditions and innovations, once introduced, become a beloved and entrenched aspect of worship. Those who want musical instruments simply quote Psalm 150, completely ignore the broader context of the passage and Old Testament usage, and deliberately avoid the clear testimony of church history since it cannot be explained away. Christian scholars universally acknowledge that musical instruments were a late innovation of the Middle Ages. The church of Christ did well without them for over 1,300 years. They were an addition of the papal church in its most corrupt period. They, along with candles, incense, beautiful priestly robes, images, relics, and mind boggling cathedrals, were part of Romanism’s use of sensual ceremonial worship. It was a Judaizing of worship that has no more place in Protestant churches than incense or altars or icons or priestly robes. It is noteworthy that both John Wycliffe (1320-1384) and John Hus (1369-1415) protested vigorously against their use.¹⁷

Morecraft’s second argument is designed to circumvent the fact that only priests and Levites could play musical instruments during temple worship. He writes,

A second problem with this view of excluding musical instruments in worship is this: in what way were choirs and musical instruments in the temple ceremonial foreshadows and prophetic types of Christ and His accomplishment of redemption? Israel used musical instruments in celebrating the saving mercy of God in their behalf before God gave Moses the blueprints of the tabernacle and the ceremonial system. “Miriam the prophetess, Aaron’s sister, took the timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and dancing” (Ex. 15:20). Although this did not take place in a worship service, the point is that Israel was accustomed to using musical instruments in their singing of God’s praises long before tabernacle worship was established.¹⁸

¹⁵ James McKinnon, *The Temple, The Church Fathers and Early Western Chant* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1965), 69. The church fathers and the early theologians who explicitly rejected the use of musical instruments in public worship are as follows: Justin Martyr (ca. 185-254); Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 35-107); Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215); Origen (ca. 185-254); Arnobius of Sicca (d. ca. 330); Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea (ca. 260-339); Athanasius of Alexandria (ca. 293-373); Hilary of Poitiers (d. 367); Chrysostom (ca. 345-404); Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (ca. 340-397); Jerome (ca. 340-420); Augustine of Hippo (354-430); Nicea, Bishop in Remasiana (5th century); Theodoret, Bishop of Syria (5th century). Churchmen of the Middle Ages such as Thomas Aquinas (13th century); Cornelius Agrippa, doctor of law (1510); Erasmus (1522); etc. held to the no instruments view. Reformers such as John Calvin, John Knox, as well as great churchmen such as David Paraeus (1618), David Calderwood (1628), William Ames (163), Richard Mather (1640), George Gillespie (1641), Samuel Rutherford (1646), John Cotton (1647), David Dickson (1655), John Brown of Wamphray (1678), Thomas Goodwin (1683), Cotton Mather (1702), James Pierce (1718), Thomas Ridgeley (1731), John Brown of Haddington (1758), and many other held to the no instruments view. We should not fail to mention the Scottish commissioners to the Westminster Assembly (1644) and the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (1644) as well. For documentation of all of this and more, see Brian M. Schwertley, *Musical Instruments in the Public Worship of God*, Appendix A “The Historical Evidence.”

¹⁶ James McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1867-1887], 1981), 8:739.

¹⁷ See *Ibid.* and Lechler, *John Wycliffe and His English Precursors* (London: The Religion Tract Society, 1904), 324; Matthew Spinka, *John Hus’ Concept of the Church*, (Princeton University Press), 306. Unfortunately, Luther did not apply sola Scriptura consistently to the sphere of public worship and thus only made modest reforms of the most obvious violations of Scripture. True and consistent reform would come with Zwingli, Calvin, and Knox.

¹⁸ Joe Morecraft, *How God Wants Us to Worship Him*, 144.

This is a very puzzling proof text for instruments in public worship for Morecraft even admits that this did not take place in a public worship service. If it did refer to public worship then Morecraft *to be consistent* would have to argue for women liturgical dancers in the worship service who leap in the aisles of the church as they shake their tambourines.¹⁹ A biblical study of such actions reveals that it was a common practice of Israel to celebrate great victories with women dancing, singing, and playing musical instruments. “Now it had happened as they were coming home, when David was returning from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women had come out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy, and with musical instruments. So the women sang as they danced” (1 Sam. 18:6-7). After the Lord delivered the people of Ammon into Jephthah’s hands it says: “When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, there was his daughter, coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing” (Jud. 11:34). The prophet Jeremiah spoke of the resettlement of the Israelites in their own land in terms of great joy and celebration: “Again I will build you, and shall be rebuilt, a virgin of Israel! You shall again be adorned with your tambourines, and shall go forth in the dances of those who rejoice” (Jer. 31:4).

These passages have a number of things in common. First, *only the women* played the instruments and danced. They are *segregated* from the men. Second, the use of instruments is *always* used in conjunction with dancing; the two are *never* separated. Third, in each instance there is a procession or forward movement. Fourth, each occasion is a direct response to a great national or local victory; that is, these are *extraordinary celebrations* and not set times of worship (however, there was annual dancing among the unmarried daughters of Shiloh, cf. Judges 21:19-23). Fifth, these celebrations were *outdoor events* like a parade or a victory procession.

Do these national and local victory celebrations with women dancing, singing, and playing taborets justify the use of musical instruments in public worship? No, not at all. Although these celebrations by God’s people were done to the glory of God, there are a number of reasons why they should not be classed as formal public worship assemblies. First, although we repeatedly encounter (in the biblical record) groups of women dancing, singing, and playing instruments at outdoor celebrations, we *never* encounter women dancing and playing instruments in the tabernacle, temple, or synagogue. Second, the Bible says that everything required for God’s worship in the wilderness was shown to Moses on the mountain (Ex. 25:40; Heb. 8:5). Yet there are no instructions in Scripture giving women the authorization to dance and play instruments in the tabernacle. Third, in the biblical account Miriam leads a group of women in song, dance, and tabor playing. Yet the tabernacle service that was prescribed by God was led and conducted only by *male* Levites. The use of musical instruments in the temple also was reserved for the Levitical priesthood, all of whom were males. Fourth, these passages are really useless for those who are seeking divine warrant for the use of pianos and organs in new covenant public worship for even if they could be applied to new covenant formal worship, they would prove that *only women* could play musical instruments *only* in conjunction with female dancing. Such a practice may be acceptable at a modern charismatic rock and roll jam fest, but is simply unacceptable to most conservative Presbyterians. The author does not know any Bible-believing Presbyterian pastors or elders who allow women to dance, leap, and play tambourines in the aisles of the church during the worship service. “The dance was an essential ingredient in the service in which instruments were used

¹⁹ “The Hebrew name of this musical instrument is *toph*. The timbrel, tymanum, or tambourine, was used chiefly by women, and was employed in choral dances, or occasions of religious or festal processions...The principle [character] of the *toph*, or timbrel, was that of a prepared skin stretched upon a hoop or frame” (James Anderson, *Calvin’s Commentary on the Psalms*, Vol. 5, p. 310, footnote 3). The timbrel was very similar to the modern tambourine. It was struck with the hand, small batons, or with a knotty whip with many thongs.

and cannot by any course of reasoning, or any evidence yet obtained, be excluded. If instrumentation on this occasion furnished a warrant for the use of instruments in the worship of the present dispensation, and that instrumentation was for the purpose of leading the dance, there is no escape from the conclusion that the dance has at least as emphatic a warrant in the New Testament worship as has the instrumentation.”²⁰ While Morecraft is a brilliant preacher and excellent scholar, I do not think he has carefully considered his argument here from a logical perspective.

After the women dancers’ argument, Morecraft offers a secondary argument in the same paragraph:

In fact, the great choirs and multitude of musical instruments were instituted for the public worship of God five hundred years after Moses, during the reigns of David and Solomon. These were not a part of the Mosaic ceremonial system. The reason that system passed off the scene was because it was fulfilled in Christ. But the question remains, what is there about musical instruments that are typical or symbolic of Christ? That question has yet to be answered by those who hold the “non-instrumental” view of public worship.²¹

Yes, we agree that the great expansion of worship under David was not part of the Mosaic system. But that does not mean that most of it was not also ceremonial. The temple, the furniture, the implements, and all sorts of things were ceremonial in nature. Moreover, if something had to be done *only by priests or Levites* then it was usually ceremonial and temporary. Under David, Asaph, and others who were prophets, the ceremonial system (that started right after the fall and was greatly developed and expanded under Moses) reached its completion and climax under David. There would be no additions or changes to this system until the death and resurrection of the Messiah and the beginning of the New Covenant era. The fact that many of the ceremonial aspects of the temple were additions to what was commanded by God under Moses is irrelevant.

It does, however, raise an interesting question. If musical instruments in public worship were not ceremonial in some sense and God has always desired His people to use them in public worship, then why were they not already in use by the time of Moses? Egypt had all sorts of ingenious and beautiful instruments. The Canaanites, Babylonians, and Ethiopians used instruments in their worship. Why did the Jews purposely avoid them?

In addition, why were musical instruments *not* used for the five hundred year period between Moses and David? Five hundred years is a long time. If someone argues that the Jews did not want to imitate their pagan neighbors then we respond by noting that like David, they could have invented new instruments of their own. The significant thing to note here is that the Jews did not use instruments in public worship *until God commanded their use*. This proves that: (1) their use is not *adiaphora* (or something indifferent/circumstantial); (b) their use had a specific purpose (it accompanied the cacophony of sound that climaxed in the sacrifice);²² (c) their use is not general (applying to all God’s

²⁰ D.W. Collins, *Musical Instruments in Divine Worship Condemned by the Word of God* (Pittsburgh: Stevenson and Foster, 1881), p. 38.

²¹ *How God Wants Us To Worship Him*, 144.

²² In the old covenant, musical instruments in public worship were *always* a function of the Levitical priesthood. Why? Because their use was intimately connected with the animal sacrifices. In fact, during the temple service, the instruments of music were *only* played during the sacrifice. When the sacrifice was not in progress, they sang praise *without* the accompaniment of musical instruments. “Then he [King Hezekiah] stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, of Gad, the king’s seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for thus was the commandment of the LORD by his prophets. The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. Then Hezekiah commanded them to offer the burnt offering on the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the LORD also began, with the trumpets and with the

people without exception) but specific (only priests and Levites could play certain instruments and they could only play them at a certain time and place relating to sacerdotal worship). Once again we see that modern churchmen who use the commands for instruments given to *certain Levitical* families to play *specific, commanded* instruments during the worship leading into the sacrifice, are comparing apples to oranges. When the commands of God are detailed and specific, who are we to make them very general and ambiguous? How does God's command for a Levitical man from a certain authorized family who is ordered to play a specific instrument justify Susan, the pastor's wife, playing the piano or organ during worship? The pro-musical instrument view is based on poor exegesis or no exegesis, as well as a false and illegitimate application. When we add the fact that the synagogues did not use musical instruments until around 1810 and Christian churches in the West did not use them until after the 12th century, this point is even more significant.

Morecraft also raises the issue as to what musical instruments represent typically or symbolically of Christ. This, however, is not really a good objection at all for a few reasons. (1) There are ceremonial laws that are not representative *directly* of Christ. The food laws regarding clean and unclean meats and the laws regarding the mixing of different crops or wearing of different types of cloths focus our attention on sanctification. Therefore, the instrumentation could be typical of the joy and triumph of God's people that results from the much greater effusion of the Holy Spirit in the New Covenant era. The use of instruments was for the Lord's people in a state of immaturity. The clash of cymbals, the blast of the trumpets, and the melody of the stringed instruments that occurred during the sacrifice could also point to the dramatic and supernatural events that attended our Lord's crucifixion. Remember that in 1 Chronicles 25:1-3, the Levitical families responsible for playing the instruments are said to "prophesy with harps, string instruments, and cymbals"(v. 1). (2) We have proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that the use of instruments was Levitical and connected to the temple and the offering of sacrifices. This was the view of the Old Testament Jews and Christendom for several centuries. The fact that we may not be sure exactly what they represent does not detract from this proof. It only proves that further study on this issue is warranted.

Morecraft's final argument is based on a quote regarding temple worship by Ron Kirby:

It seems that a better way to look at the question would be to say that God, in the Temple worship, showed us how He is pleased to be worshiped, and that therefore all the elements of Temple worship should inform our worship today. Even if we consider the element of sacrifice, we must say that our worship today must be centered upon the offerings of a pure sacrifice to God, for "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness," Hebrews 9:22. Of course, the way we bring such a sacrifice to God has changed; we no longer bring animals as sacrifices, but we come to God pleading the blood of the one Sacrifice for sins. The sacrifice has not been abolished, but it has been transformed. It is the same with other elements of OT worship, including instrumental music. God has shown us that instrumental music in worship pleases Him, and so we continue to use it, unless there are biblical

instruments of David king of Israel. So all the congregation worshiped, the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded; all this continued until the burnt offering was finished" (2 Chron. 29:25-28). When the sacrifice began, the use of musical instruments by the Levites began. When the offering was completed, the use of musical instruments also ceased. Is it not obvious to the unbiased interpreted that the instrumental music served a ceremonial function? John Calvin writes, "The Levites, under the law, were justified in making use of instrumental music in the worship of God; it having been his will to train his people, while they were yet tender and like children, by such rudiments, until the coming of Christ. But now when the clear light of the gospel has dissipated the shadows of the law, and taught us that God is to be served in a simpler form, it would be a foolish and mistaken part to imitate that which the prophet enjoined only upon those of his own time. From this, it is apparent that the Papists have shown themselves to be very apes in transferring this to themselves" (John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981], 2:312).

grounds for its cessation.²³

This is a sloppy and irrational statement. The sacrifices of the Old Testament have not been transformed by Jesus but fulfilled by Him and His redemptive work. That is why the Old Testament sacrifices have indeed been *abolished* or *abrogated*. They were types that pointed to the reality and once the reality came, the types no longer applied at all. Yes, we certainly are always to approach God in worship, prayer and life solely through Christ and His finished work but this is not a transformation either. What is the same is the object of faith. But in the New Covenant era, we look back at a completed redemption. The Old Testament saints had their faith strengthened and informed by shadows and beggarly elements. But their prayers and worship were still accepted solely because of Christ's work to come.

With this in mind, we come to the statement, "It is the same with other elements of OT worship, including instrumental music. God has shown us that instrumental music pleases Him, and so we continue to use it, unless there are biblical grounds for its cessation."²⁴ This is a puzzling and arbitrary statement. If musical instruments in the temple worship should be looked at in the same manner as the sacrifices of the temple then how does that support his position? Sacrifices have been abolished or abrogated at the cross. We are not to offer bloody sacrifices anymore for to do so would be a denial of the completed work of Christ and thus would be sinful. The New Testament speaks of offering ourselves as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1) but this is speaking of personal sanctification and the self-denial, pain, affliction, hardships, and all the personal sacrifices this holiness requires.

But doesn't he have a good point when he says that instrumental music pleases Him so we should continue to use it today? No. He has not carefully thought through this statement. In the Old Covenant administration, God was very pleased with incense, bloody sacrifices, burnt offerings, ritual washings, priestly garments, etc. when such things were used in sincerity with true faith. The fact that God was pleased with such things does not tell us whether they were ceremonial or not. That must be determined by looking at the who, when, and why of such practices. If God wanted instrumental music to accompany singing, why was it restricted to the priests and Levites in the Temple during the sacrifice? Why did He wait until the time of David to authorize its use in worship? Since God was pleased with many things in worship found in the Old Testament that have been *abrogated* by the coming of Christ, the issue still remains whether there is clear evidence that: (1) musical instruments in temple worship were *not* ceremonial (the evidence that their use was ceremonial is overwhelming); (2) the New Testament or apostolic church used musical instruments in the public worship of God. Does the New Testament authorize instrumental music in public worship? No. There is not a shred of evidence in the New Testament for the use of musical instruments.²⁵ Their use is not commanded nor is there even one historical example of their use in the apostolic church. This should come as no surprise, given the fact that the new covenant church was closely patterned after the synagogue, which did not

²³ Morecraft, 144-145.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 45.

²⁵ "To account for the silence of the New Testament respecting the use of instruments in worship, we think it clear that they were appointed for the temple, and as a companion to the sacrifice; that with these they were connected, and with these they ceased; in fact, that when 'the tabernacle of David' fell [Amos 9:1; Isa. 16:5; Acts 15:15-17, etc.], the Davidic appointment of Levites fell with it. In reply, attempts are made to show that this instrumental service has a place in the synagogue. But this involves an immense difficulty – that as the synagogue furnished the general platform of ecclesiastical order in the Christian Church, if instruments belonged to the former, they should have had their place in the latter. But this is not accordant with the fact that the apostolic Church did not use them, nor the post-apostolic Church for several centuries. For the use of musical instruments in the synagogue the evidence is very evanescent – is indeed nothing. It is certain that the New Testament supplies none" (James Glasgow, *Heart and Voices: Instrumental Music in Christian Worship Not Divinely Authorized*, [Belfast: Coaithchison; J. Cleeland, N.D.], 12).

use musical instruments, and the overwhelming Old Testament evidence that musical instruments served as ceremonial types.

Although the New Testament does not authorize the use of musical instruments in public worship, it is not silent regarding the worship of God. The author of Hebrews says: “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name” (13:15). “Animal sacrifices had been rendered forever obsolete by the sacrifice of Christ, but the sacrifice of thanksgiving might still be offered to God, and indeed should be offered to Him by all who appreciated the perfect sacrifice of Christ. No longer in association with animal sacrifices, but through Jesus. The sacrifice of praise was acceptable to God.”²⁶ Since Christians praise God through Christ and His perfect sacrifice and not with ceremonial types (e.g., incense, candles, musical instruments), they are to speak “to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, *singing and making melody in your hearts to the LORD*” (Eph. 5:19). “The Greek word for ‘make music’ is *psallo*, which means originally ‘to pluck the strings of an instrument.’ This gives a beautiful picture of what true and acceptable praise of God really is. Since the word *psallo* cannot be separated from the word ‘heart,’ it literally means ‘plucking the strings of your heart to the LORD.’ When the music of the heart is expressed through lips that confess the LORD’s name, there is no need for supporting instruments.”²⁷

Psalm 150’s Poetic Message

Having noted how Morecraft’s use of Psalm 150 explicitly contradicts the broader context of Scripture or the explicit imperatives and indicatives related to who, what, where, and when instruments were to be used in temple worship, we turn our attention to another serious problem with his interpretation. Psalm 150 is not even meant to be taken literally. It is a poetic passage telling God’s people to offer fervent, dedicated praise throughout the earth. If its poetic, non-literal message is taken literally and not interpreted in light of other clear didactic passages then the following insurmountable problems emerge. (1) Dancing and taboret playing is required in public worship. Presbyterians cannot use this as a proof text for pianos and organs and then arbitrarily leave out women dancing with taborets. To do so is arbitrary and inconsistent. We do not have this problem for we recognize its poetic-exaggerated way of speaking and note that dancing and taboret playing through the Old Testament was only preformed outdoors by women during unique festive occasions (Ex. 15:20; Jud. 11:34; 21:21; 1 Sam. 18:6, 22:11, 29:5; Jer. 31:4).

(2) The passage would require *every* Christian to praise God in public worship with instruments. If we are to take this passage in *isolation* from the many clear passages indicating that only priests and Levites could play instruments, then our modern application is arbitrary. I attended a charismatic church in Berkeley, California that took this passage literally and encouraged every member to bring an instrument to church. Those who could not play a guitar, mandolin, banjo, bass, or bongos, were encouraged to play the tambourine and dance in the aisles. We had a wild and crazy time.

(3) The heathen and brute creatures would have to join in the public worship service for they appear to be mentioned in verse 6. Obviously, this Psalm is not a literal guide for public worship. It is an exhortation expressed in poetic language teaching that every believer in heaven and earth should praise Jehovah with every fiber of their being. Regarding Psalm 150:3, Calvin writes, “I do not insist upon the words in Hebrew signifying the musical instrument [in other words they may just be poetic metaphors exhorting believers to great praise]; only let the reader remember that sundry different kinds are here mentioned, which were in use under the legal economy, the more forcibly to teach the children

²⁶ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 405.

²⁷ Robert B. McCracken, *What About Musical Instruments in Worship?* (tract).

of God that they cannot apply themselves too diligently to the praises of God.”²⁸

A biblical view of Psalm 150 is more readily found in the older Presbyterian and Reformed commentators. The Covenanter David Dickson writes of verse 3-5,

Here are other six exhortations, teaching the manner of praising God under the shadow of typical music, appointed in the ceremonial law. Whence learn. 1. Albeit the typical ceremonies of musical instruments in God’s public worship, belonging to the pedagogy of the church, in her minority before Christ, be now abolished with the rest of the ceremonies; yet the moral duties shadowed forth by them, are still to be studied, because this duty of praising God, and praising him with all our mind, strength, and soul, is moral, whereunto we are perpetually obliged.²⁹

Matthew Henry writes,

In what manner this tribute must be paid, with all the kinds of musical instruments that were then use in the temple-service, v. 3-5...Our concern is to know...that, various instruments being used in praising God, it should be done with exact and perfect harmony; they must not hinder, but help one another. The New Testament concern, instead of this, is with one mind and one mouth to glorify God, Rom xv.6...He began with a call to those who had a place in his sanctuary and were employed in the temple-service; but he concludes with a call to all the children of men, in prospect of the time when the Gentiles should be taken into the church, and in every place, as acceptably as at Jerusalem, this incense should be offered, Mal. i.2.³⁰

The Reformed Baptist scholar John Gill writes,

Praise him with the psaltery; to which songs were sung. And harps which were instruments, both were used in divine worship under the former dispensation; and in which David was well skilled and delighted and appointed proper persons to praise with them, 1 Chron. xv. 20, 21. They were typical of the spiritual melody made in the hearts of God’s people, while they were praising him in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, under the Gospel, Ephes. v. 19.³¹

(4)The passage would *only authorize* the instruments mentioned and not modern pianos, guitars, drums, and organs. After insisting that Christians must obey the regulative principle of worship, Morecraft takes a passage that mentions *only* instruments used in the worship of Jehovah in the Old Testament and then assumes with *absolutely no exegetical proof* that it authorizes modern non-commanded instruments. We must remind ourselves that *all the instruments* used during the public worship of God in the temple were authorized or commanded by God. The *nebel*, *kinnoir*, and *cymbals* were designed by David under divine inspiration. The *two silver trumpets* were designed by Moses according to God’s plan. Everything related to the temple and everything done in the temple was to be according to God’s will revealed to His prophets. Therefore, we must acknowledge that the instruments played during public worship are *not adiaphora* and *the regulative principle extends even to the kind of instruments used*. This runs counter to everything most Christians have been taught today but it is certainly true. If it is not true, then Morecraft must explain why from Moses (1461 B.C.) to David (1016 B.C.), a period of 445 years, *only* two silver trumpets were played during the sacrifice. He must explain why from David (1016 B.C.) to the destruction of the temple (A.D. 70), a period of 1,086

²⁸ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 5:320.

²⁹ David Dickson, *The Psalms* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1959 [1633-5]), 2:536.

³⁰ Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: MacDonald, N.D. [1710]) 3:788-789.

³¹ John Gill, *Exposition on the Old Testament*, 4:327.

years, the Jews *only* used the two silver trumpets as well as the *nebel*, *kinnoir*, and *cymbals*. The faithful Jews had the *exact same instruments* and a perfect uniformity of worship because the commanded instruments designed by God were treated just like everything else associated with the temple: they had to be authorized and invented by God, not autonomous man. The temple and its worship were holy, sacred, and set apart. “Therefore it must not be left to man’s art or invention to contrive it, but must be framed by divine institution.”³² Those Christians who want pianos, organs, guitars, bass guitars, drums, mandolins, banjos, violins, or any other non-commanded or non-Spirit designed instruments in public worship today must not only demonstrate that their use was *not* Levitical or ceremonial (and thus temporary), but must also prove that the choice of instruments in the Old Testament was *adiaphora* or something indifferent. Substantial proofs for their positions have never been offered because they do not exist. They also need to explain why the Jewish synagogues did not use musical instruments until the nineteenth century (and even then only in liberal synagogues) and why the Christian church did not use them for over 1,200 years.

Morecraft’s Secondary Arguments

Morecraft offers a number of other arguments for using musical instruments in public worship that merit our attention. We will consider each argument separately. He writes,

First, God commanded the use of musical instruments to assist us in the singing of His praises in worship. Many of the psalms are written to the choir director and list at the beginning of the psalm the musical instrument that is best suited to accompany that particular psalm. Psalm 4 is best accompanied with stringed instruments, Psalm 5 with flute accompaniment, Psalm 6 with stringed instruments, upon an eight-stringed lyre, and Psalm 12 is best accompanied with an eight-stringed lyre.³³

Regarding this argument, we should note that it is answered primarily in the same manner as our discussion of the broad context of Psalm 150. What does David mean by “choir director” or “chief musician” in the Psalm titles? Is David advocating that every Christian congregation appoint a “musical director” or “worship leader” as we find in most large Charismatic, evangelical, and corrupt Reformed churches? No. He is speaking of the *appointed* leader of the *authorized* “choir director” over the *Levitical* choir. In some Psalms, he is speaking to the director or directors over the Levitical families who were assigned specific instruments for the worship of the temple. He is not referring to “choir directors” or “musical directors” in synagogues or the local non-ceremonial congregations for we know that they did not use instruments. H.C. Leupold writes,

It is quite commonly conceded that the first of these [“chief musician”] may be correctly translated “choir master” (KJV). But even after this is posited, the question still remains, Why should these psalms have been assigned to him? For the present we offer only one suggestion, which to us seems the most reasonable of all, that the author of the psalm, usually David, put the psalm into the hands of the choirmaster with the intent and purpose that he might rehearse it with the Levitical choirs and so introduce it to Israel for public worship.³⁴

David Dickson writes, “Albeit the ceremonial, figurative, and religious use of musical

³² Matthew Henry, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 2:908.

³³ Morecraft, 142.

³⁴ H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker [1959, 61] 1969), 9.

instruments be gone, with the rest of the Levitical shadows,...yet the vocal singing of the Psalms in the church is not taken away, as the practice and doctrine of Christ and his apostles make evidence....”³⁵ Perowne adds these relevant comments:

“For the Precentor,” which occurs fifty-five times in all, in the inscriptions, is found fifty-two times in the first three books. In the case of the latter Psalms, it was understood as a matter of course, that they were designed for the Temple service; but in the case of the earlier Psalms, this direction, “For the precentor,” was prefixed with the very object of making them liturgical. The three Psalms, cix., cxxxix., cxl., where this direction appears in the later books, are such as, by their contents, required to be thus clearly marked as intended for public worship. Whereas, on the other hand, Psalms like the eighth, the twenty-ninth, the thirty-third, in the first book, did not require any such specification, because from their general character they might at once be assumed to be liturgical.³⁶

Once again, it is necessary to remind ourselves that these Psalms titles meant something very specific to the original audience. David and other authors of the Psalms told the Levitical music leaders to use the authorized instruments and often even suggested certain melodies. The Levitical choir and musicians would learn a song and use it in temple worship. These songs were then used in synagogues and later in Christian churches, *without* Levitical directors and musicians, because they understood that that ministry was restricted to the temple. That is a fact of history that cannot be circumvented. If modern Christian churches want to use these kinds of passages for musical instruments today, then they should be consistent and *ordain* all the music directors as well as all *choir* personnel and church musicians. Remember, playing music at the temple was *only* for *ordained church officers* (priests and Levites of certain families set apart by God) and thus not for anyone who had a gift. Those like Morecraft who appeal to these titles should also restrict themselves to *only* the instruments authorized by God (the *nebel*, *kinoir*, and *cymbals*).

I think that Morecraft’s best argument for the use of man-made, non-commanded, non-priestly or Levitical instruments is found in the instructions of the title of Psalm 5: “To the Chief Musician. With flutes [“upon *Nehiloth*, KJV]. A Psalm of David.” If this is referring to flutes or a type of aerophone (e.g., ancient reed instruments or bone flutes), then we have an instrument that is definitely not described among the commanded instruments designed under divine inspiration by David for the temple. Regarding this title, we should note the following. (1) If the Scriptures clearly teach that the instruments used in public worship were commanded, one should not interpret this title in a manner that contradicts this established teaching. This point is especially applicable here since the view of most Hebrew scholars is that the titles were added *after* the Psalms were written and may not be inspired. We should heed the words of Noetscher: “The headings are apparently old and are therefore not to be set aside without sufficient ground. But they do not belong to the text.”³⁷ Some disagree but most do not.

(2) There is disagreement about the Hebrew word *nehilot* here which is *only* found in this title in the whole Old Testament. The common word for wind instruments in our Hebrew Bibles is *ugab* (Gen. 4:21; Job 21:12; 30:31; Psalm 150:4) often translated as “organ” (KJV) or “flute” (NKJV). But even this word is disputed for it is regarded as a stringed instrument or possibly a word denoting an instrument in general in the Qumran Psalm Scroll. Psalm 151:2 (Heb.) reads: “My hands have made a *ugab* and my fingers a *kinnoir* [i.e., a stringed harp].” Some scholars believe *nehilot* may only be a

³⁵ David Dickson, *Psalms*, 14.

³⁶ J.J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms: A New Translation, with Introduction and Notes Explanatory and Critical*(London: Warren F. Draper, 1876), 1:72.

³⁷ As quoted in H.C. Leupold, 6.

vocal instruction. As John Gill explains,

The Septuagint version, which is followed by the Vulgate Latin and Ethiopic versions, renders it, *for that which obtained the inheritance*; and the Arabic version, *concerning the inheritance*; and to this agrees the old Midrash of the Jews; but what is the meaning that is left to every one to conjecture; the reason of these versions is because the root from whence this word is supposed to be derived signifies *to inherit*: the Targum renders the whole inscription thus, *to sing upon the dances a song of David*, as it does the title of the preceding psalm; Aben Ezra takes the word, as he does *niginoth*, to be the first word of some song, to the tune of which this psalm was to be sung.³⁸

Obviously, this title should not be used as a proof text for flutes in public worship.

The Book of Revelation Argument

Morecraft's second supporting argument is based on the book of Revelation and the fact that humans are intrinsically musical: "Second, God loves music. Music surrounds His throne in heaven (Rev. 5:8-9; 14:1-4). He invented it and put it in the hearts of human beings to create music and musical instruments, and to write and play beautiful music. He also created man and woman in His image so they would enjoy and be affected by music."³⁹

Morecraft will appeal to the book of Revelation again a few pages later. After once again emphasizing the crucial nature of Psalm 150 he writes, "In fact, the command is illustrated and enforced in the pictures of the church's consummated worship in the presence of God."⁴⁰ He then quotes Revelation 5:8-9, 14:1-4, and 15:2-4. Before we begin with our analysis of these arguments, it is important to note that God loves many things that are not incorporated into public worship. The issue has always been and remains: What has God *authorized* for non-ceremonial public worship in the New Covenant era?

The main problem with Morecraft's book of Revelation argument (once again) boils down to his illegitimate use and arbitrary method of interpretation and application. Revelation is what scholars call apocalyptic literature. It is full of symbols, figures, and pictures. Many of the things mentioned in the book of Revelation are not meant to be taken literally. Is there a scarlet beast which has seven heads and ten horns (Rev. 17:3)? Are there actual bowls that contain God's wrath waiting to be poured out (Rev. 14:7; 16:1)? Is there a literal temple (Rev. 15:5) or a golden altar (Rev. 8:3)? Does an angel come out of the temple in heaven with a literal sickle (Rev. 14:18f.)? Are angels burning real incense in heaven (Rev. 8:3)? Do they literally take fire from the altar and throw it on the earth (Rev. 8:5f.)? Note that John continually refers to Jesus Christ as "the lamb" (Rev. 5:6, 8, 12-13; 6:1, 16; 7:9-10, 14; 12:11; 13:8; 14:1, 4, 10; etc.). He refers to the Church as "the temple" (3:12; 11:1-2) and the "New Jerusalem" (3:12; 21:2, 10). John mentions the "ark of His covenant" (11:19) and even repeatedly describes an altar (6:9; 8:3, 5; 9:13; 11:1; 14:18; 16:7). Is John speaking of a literal altar? No. Philip Hughes writes: "Furthermore, when he says that he saw them *under the altar* [v. 9], this should not be taken to mean

³⁸ John Gill, *A Commentary on the Old Testament*, 3:541. Ivor H. Jones writes, "1 Chr. 15:20 suggests that an instrumental interpretation of this word [*nihilot*] is inappropriate. It could perhaps refer to vocal instructions (cf. Exod. 15:20; Judg. 11:34)" ("Music and Musical Instruments" in David Noel Freedman editor in Chief, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* [New York: Doubleday, 1992], 4:936).

³⁹ Morecraft, 10.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 145.

that here is a literal altar in the heavenly realm. The altar of sacrifice in the Mosaic system with its priesthood and offerings, pointed forward typologically to the altar of the cross, where Christ, both High Priest and Victim, offered Himself up for us sinners.”⁴¹ The book of Revelation mentions incense (8:4), but John specifically says that the incense is *symbolic* of the prayers of the saints. John refers to the use of trumpets (1:10; 4:1; 8:13; 9:14), but in each instance the trumpets symbolize voices or announcements of judgment. “John did not hear a literal trumpet, but the sound of a voice likened to the sound of a trumpet (4:1). Similarly, the music that John heard (14:2, Greek text) was not the sound of harps. It was the sound of human voices likened to harpers harping with their harps.”⁴² As incense represented the prayers of God’s people, the harps represented the praise of the saints. “The very employment of these ceremonial symbols – taken, as they are from an abrogated system – further confirms the fact that they are not any part of New Testament worship.”⁴³ Those churchmen who deliberately ignore the apocalyptic-symbolic nature of the book to prove that we should have instruments in public worship today have treated symbolic sections of the book as a literal narrative, but only when it suits their purpose.

In addition, those who appeal to the harps and trumpet blasts ignore the use of the altar, the incense, the white robes, and golden crowns. We do not find Morecraft and other conservative Presbyterians advocating temples, altars, incense, or special robes in worship. The reason they do not is that they recognize the ceremonial and symbolic nature of these things. Why, we ask, do they accept the one (musical instruments) but not the others? The reason lies not in biblical exegesis or the use of biblical Protestant procedures of interpretation but in human tradition. Their spiritual forefathers abandoned the position of the synagogues, the apostolic church, the church fathers, and the best reformed churches and thus they must make vain attempts to defend their declension. The only other alternative is to admit they are wrong and repent.

Humans Were Created To Create and Play Music

But what about Morecraft’s statement, “He invented it and put it in the hearts of human beings to create music and musical instruments, and to write and play beautiful music”?⁴⁴ Yes, God created man with a number of innate abilities and desires. Man is very creative and thus can make beautiful architecture, amazing works of art, and incredible feats of engineering. We find the invention of music very early in man’s history. The grandson of Cain whose name was Jubal invented the harp and the flute. But does the fact that human beings like music and are generally gifted to play music tell us anything about public worship? The answer is no, it does not. If it did, then to be consistent we should also incorporate liturgical painters, sculptors, dancers, and performers based on such a viewpoint. There are churches today that do have liturgical artists, dancers, and performers based on such a viewpoint. But such thinking is a denial of the regulative principle and would lead to an almost infinite number of creative options in public worship. While it might be fun to have rock bands, full orchestras, music soloists, sculptors, painters, dancers, and the like during the public worship service, God would not like it at all and would condemn it for it is not authorized in special revelation. Such argumentation is well suited to the humanists in the church growth movement or to papists and their gaudy idolatrous gimmicks but it is not biblical or Reformed.

⁴¹ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 88.

⁴² G.I. Williamson, *Instrumental Music in the Worship of God*, 10.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Morecraft, 140.

Music Must Be Beautiful and Joyful

In his third supporting argument, Morecraft implies that worship will be drab, austere, and boring without musical instruments. He writes,

Third, the public worship of God is not only to be pure and unmixed with the traditions of men, it must also be beautiful and joyful in its music. Simplicity of worship according to the regulative principle of worship does not in any way imply that worship is to be drab, ugly, austere, and boring. Biblical worship is to be filled with beautiful, joyful, and inspiring music. We see this particularly in the worship services of Israel during the reign of King David.

All these were under the direction of their father to sing in the house of the Lord, with cymbals, harps and lyres, for the service of the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun and Heman were under the direction of the king. Their number who were trained in singing to the Lord, with their relatives, all who were skillful, was 288. (1 Chronicles 25:6-7)

When the priests came forth from the holy place (for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves, without regard to divisions), and all the Levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and kinsmen, clothed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, standing east of the altar, and with them one hundred and twenty priests blowing trumpets, in unison when the trumpeters and the singers were to make themselves heard with one voice to praise and to glorify the Lord, and when they lifted up their voice accompanied by trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and when they praised the Lord saying, "He indeed is good for His lovingkindness is everlasting," then the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the God. (2 Chronicles 5:11-14)

What beautiful and joyful music this must have been in the worship of God – choirs, hundreds of trained musicians, and singing accompanied with a variety of musical instruments! And God was so pleased with this service that He made His presence in the service known to the people worshipping Him, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.

No greater joy can be experienced than when God condescends in lovingkindness to meet with His people in their worship of Him, which is filled with beautiful music.⁴⁵

As we consider this argument, it needs to be pointed out that I am not aware of any *a cappella* psalm singers in the United States who believe that the singing of praise in public worship ought to be boring, ugly, austere, or drab. As someone who came out of the charismatic movement and then attended O.P.C and P.C.A churches, I have seen everything in worship from progressive rock bands, to full piece orchestras, to giant pipe organs, to acoustic guitars and pianos and organs. The most beautiful, joyful, and exciting worship that I have ever experienced has been the singing of God's Word without musical accompaniment. When we sing the infallible Word of God with His people corporately, there is a joy that cannot be compared to the excitement of a guitar solo or pipe organ. I would challenge anyone to compare the beauty of worship at one of the R.P.C.N.A conferences where over a thousand Christians can be heard singing the psalms *a cappella* to the worship of a very large P.C.A church where, in my opinion, the musical instruments usually choke out the congregational singing. This is especially true of the large pipe organs. But my personal opinion is not what matters. If Morecraft has a solid, valid exegetical argument from Scripture, we should submit to the Word of God. How does he prove his argument?

He appeals to historical examples from the time of David where the *Levites appointed by God* to the task of singing as a choir sang and the *priests appointed by the Holy Spirit* to the blowing of

⁴⁵ Ibid, 140-141.

trumpets blew the trumpets. The Levitical leaders appointed by Jehovah through David to the cymbals (Asaph and sons) played their assigned instruments. In each case, the playing was associated directly with the service of the house of God (1 Chron. 25:6; 2 Chron. 5:11-14) or the ark of the covenant (1 Chron. 15:25-16:1). This musical accompaniment by priests and Levites was accompanied by the sacrificial ritual (2 Chron. 5:6; 29:25-28). The choice of priests and certain families of Levites to play instruments in public worship was commanded, specific, and non-negotiable. This point is demonstrated not only by the absolute consistency of the commands and historical examples found throughout the Old Testament, but also by 1 Chronicles 15 where David, the priests, and the Levites were rebuked for not following the *precise instructions* of Scripture in moving the ark during their first attempt (read verses 11-15). Does Morecraft believe that non-priests and non-Levites could have played instruments in public worship with God's approval? If he does, on what exegetical basis? We have already seen that women dancing with their tambourines during victory processions or parades does not support his view. If Morecraft admits that only priests and Levites could play specific, commanded instruments in public worship (given the overwhelming evidence, he should), then he needs to explain how that translates to *anyone* playing *anything* in New Covenant public worship today. If he appeals to the priesthood of all believers, then he has a major problem for the Old Testament believers were also called priests and kings (see Ex. 19:6; Rev. 5:10; Isa. 61:6). Perhaps as some teach, the strict, specific nature of the regulative principle has been relaxed in the New Covenant era. Morecraft's book proves that he has rejected such an arbitrary, unscriptural idea. But, sadly in his fervent desire to hang on to the corruptions of his spiritual forefathers (which are only about one hundred and thirty years old), his brilliant exegetical skills and noteworthy logical consistency has been set aside.

Music Adds Festive Joy

In Morecraft's final supporting argument, he quotes 1 Chronicles 15:16 where the Levites and their appointed families for the Levitical choir and the commanded instruments are said to do their appointed tasks with "resounding joy." The assumption here is that we need to imitate the priests and Levites today so our worship will be more joyful. Having repeatedly proved that the use of instruments was restricted to the priests and Levites for the service of the ark of the covenant or temple, we will only make a few observations about this argument. (1) Was the worship without musical instruments that took place among God's people for over 1,000 years prior to David non-joyful and inferior? If instruments were necessary and integral, why did God wait until David and the temple to introduce them? (2) The sweet smell of the incense was also joyful as was the beauty of the temple and the priestly garments. But these things, like musical instruments were priestly, Levitical, and temporary. High church Episcopalians, Romanists, and the Eastern Orthodox are consistent in imitating all the glory and pomp of the old economy (the Eastern Orthodox communions have, however, not allowed musical accompaniment). Morecraft in this argument has sided with James Jordan and Peter Leithart against the Scottish reformation. (3) When Paul speaks of producing biblical joy and happiness as a counter to the false joy of alcoholic beverages, he says, "be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:18-19; cf. Col. 3:16). The apostle did not refer to the use of instruments because they were not needed and they were not used. As he says in Hebrews, "by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name" (Heb. 13:15). Unlike the sacrifices of the Levitical system which were accompanied with incense and musical instruments and priestly activities, now we worship God through Christ with the "fruit of our lips" or congregational

singing.

The Appeal to Church History

Morecraft supports this argument with a reference to church history. He writes,

In 1657, some of the participants in the Westminster Assembly in London, who gave us the *Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms* in the 1640s, published a lengthy, annotated commentary on the entire Bible. Their comment on Psalm 150 is worth quoting: “[God] exhorts them that they might praise God the better, to stir up their joy with musical instruments. And if musical instruments...had the power then; how have they changed their nature since?” This quote is an interesting one because it shows the attitude of these men toward the use of musical instruments in the worship of God – they were for it!⁴⁶

While there were men in the seventeenth century who held to Morecraft’s position, it was *not* the position of the Westminster Assembly or the Church of Scotland. Note what the Scottish delegates to the Westminster Assembly (John Maitland, Alexander Henderson, Samuel Rutherford, Robert Bailie, and George Gillespie) said in the report to the General Assembly of Scotland in 1644,

[W]e cannot but admire the good hand of GOD in the great things done here already, particularly; That the Covenant (the Foundation of the whole Work) is taken; Prelacie and the whole train thereof, extirpated; The Service-Book in many places forsaken, plain and powerful preaching set up; Many Colleges in *Cambridge* provided with such Ministers, as are most zealous of the best Reformation; Altars removed; The Communion in some places given at the Table sitting; The great Organs at *Pauls* and of *Peters* in *Westminster* taken down; Images and many other monuments of Idolatry defaced and abolished.⁴⁷

George Gillespie wrote, “The Jewish Church, not as it was a church but as it was Jewish, had an High Priest, typifying our great High Priest, Jesus Christ. As it was Jewish, it had musicians to play upon harps, psalteries, cymbals and other musical instruments in the temple.”⁴⁸ Samuel Rutherford concurs,

God’s spirit worketh not with Ceremonies, and so they are as the offering of Swine’s blood, and the slaying of a man; and so Abomination to God, Isa. 66:1, 2. The holy spirit is merited to us by Christ, Joh. 16:14. He shall receive of mine, and shew unto you: But who can say that the grace of joy in the holy Ghost, wrought by the droning of Organs, and the holinesse taught by the Surplice, is a work of the spirit merited by Christ as our High Priest? Now Altars, Organs, Jewish Ephods, or Surplice, Masse-cloaths, and Romish Crossing, bowing to Altars, Images, are badges of Jewish and Popish Religion.⁴⁹

In an official letter to the Church of England in 1644 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland wrote, “We were greatly refreshed to hear by Letters from out Commissioners there with you of the great good things the Lord hath wrought among you and for your many corruptions, as Altars,

⁴⁶ Ibid, 143.

⁴⁷ *The Letter from the Commissioners at London to the General Assembly* (1641). As quoted in Brian Schwertley, *Musical Instruments in the Public Worship of God*, 118.

⁴⁸ George Gillespie, *Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland* (1641), as quoted in Ibid, 118.

⁴⁹ Samuel Rutherford, *The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication* (1646), in Ibid, 119.

Images, and other Monuments of Idolatry and Superstition removed the great Organs at *Pauls* and *Peters* taken down.”

Conclusion

While we certainly agree with our brother on the importance of the regulative principle of worship, we strongly disagree on his application to instrumental music in public worship. This issue is not personal but exegetical. This is an important issue for Romanizing errors and gross inconsistencies in public worship once introduced become entrenched and are exceptionally difficult to remove. Men come up with clever arguments to defend declension and the status quo. This unfortunately is what our dear brother has done. While we both agree that instruments had a commanded beginning and functioned under the regulative principle, Morecraft is unwilling to apply the specific, biblical rules regarding *who* could play the instruments, *what* instruments could be used, and *where* and *when* they were to be played.⁵⁰

If something relating to public worship was not a matter of liberty under the Old Covenant then the same rules should apply in the New Covenant era. If we still had a temple with its ceremonies, incense, priests, Levites, and sacrifices, we would still have harps, lyres, and cymbals but these things have all been set out of gear by the coming of Christ. If Jesus and the Spirit inspired apostles had wanted *anyone* in the church to play *any instrument* he or she desired, then they would have revealed this to us in the New Testament. Instead, we are only commanded to sing praise with our lips and make melodies with our hearts. Given the clear Scriptural evidence and the overwhelming testimony of church history, we ask our Reformed brothers who have caved in to the declension of Rome⁵¹ and the modern desire for entertainment to repent.

Sadly, we are living in a time of serious declension regarding worship and doctrine. Many people are not interested in reform. Too many church leaders are content to defend the status quo. (But, a non-reforming church is a deforming one.) When confronted with the biblical evidence regarding the use of musical instruments in the public worship (also, unauthorized holy days and exclusive psalmody) the response usually is: “*I don’t want to hear it. Who cares? That’s interesting but I love the sound of musical instruments in worship. This issue could be divisive, so just drop it.*” These answers reveal an unscriptural, anti-reformed attitude. “Is it not evident – painfully evident – that they are really arrogant words? ‘Who cares what God wants,’ such people say in effect: ‘So long as I have what I want! I am the important one!’ This is the very antithesis of true religion.”⁵² Human traditions have the ability to pull the heartstrings. That is why they are so dangerous to the purity of gospel worship. Our

⁵⁰ It is very interesting and noteworthy that, in every defense of the use of musical instruments in public worship that I have heard or read, the arguments are very general. In addition, the detailed specific arguments by those who hold the non-instrumental position regarding the who, when, what, and why of instrumental music in the temple worship are ignored. I suppose someone could point out that non-ceremonial aspects of what the Levites did such as Scripture reading, teaching, and discipline continue with New Covenant ministers of the gospel. But no one argues that only ministers or elders can play instruments in the New Covenant era. If the only way that a practice can be defended is to deliberately *avoid* the particulars or to set aside exegetical precision, then there is obviously a serious problem. A defense based on ignorance or a studious avoidance of what the passages are actually teaching is nothing but a smoke screen or an excuse for declension. Morecraft with all his great intellectual abilities grasps at straws and proves nothing.

⁵¹ James Glasgow writes, “If, as some imagine, the apostles employed instruments of music in public worship, their instruments must have been buried along with them. They had a considerably protracted entombment, for they had no resurrection until at least seven or eight centuries afterwards. They did not reappear in Christian worship until the dark ages of Popery when, by unauthorized additions to the worship of the Church, men had greatly marred the divine beauty and simplicity of pure New Testament worship.”

⁵² G.I. Williamson, *Instrumental Music in the Worship of God*, 15.

hope and prayer is that the Holy Spirit would bring revival to His church and destroy these innovations root and branch. It is not a time to be arrogant but to be humble, to pray, and to work for reformation. Let us return to the simple, unadorned worship of the apostolic church and our Calvinistic forefathers. May God have mercy on His Church and return it to the landmarks of the Reformation.

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