

Reformation
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1. To encourage *reformation* in the local Christian churches worldwide,
 2. To promote the cause of *revival* and spiritual awakening through prayer and the provision of resources to aid Christian leaders.
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The conviction of the staff and editors of the *Reformation & Revival Journal* is that awakening, of the kind seen in the First Great Awakening in this country, wedded to the doctrinal concerns of the historic Protestant Reformation as expressed in the terms *sola scriptura*, *sola gratia*, and *sola fide*, is needed in our generation.

The views expressed in this publication should be considered as the personal opinions of the authors and are not to be taken as an official editorial perspective.

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Editor's Introduction

I have observed many church divisions in my travels. Some surround doctrinal concerns. Others have to do with the ministry of the pastor. But few areas of ministry within the life of the Christian church create as many questions and divisions as music. It seems everyone, extremely talented or otherwise, has a decided opinion about church music. Most seem certain, at times to the point of decided dogmatism, what music is spiritual and what music is not. And nothing more plainly divides Christian believers on an emotional level than music, both its substance and its style. But why?

Perhaps it is because music speaks so directly to the emotions of human beings. Here the reason is sometimes bypassed and the heart is moved in a profoundly direct way. And personal tastes clearly vary, especially in cultures that have strong traditions regarding the music they like. Our choice of a local church will often be based more upon the music sung and played than upon anything else. We may not actually articulate this but it is nonetheless true. Consequently conflict over music is almost inevitable when *personal* choices and opinions are given a high level of authority in decision making.

The question the thinking Christian must ask is this: Is there any objective criteria in the Word of God that will help me regarding my preferences in music? Or, is all music permitted to me as a Christian? Is some music sacred while other music is secular? What makes the difference? What is permitted musically in the public worship of God? Is there a place for instrumentation in public worship? If so, of what kind? Should we sing contemporary music? If so, what is the basis for our choice? Is there music which God accepts and approves that glorifies Him? Can music have harmful effects, especially upon the life of a congregation? These, and a host of related questions, demand the attention of serious believers who pray and labor for reformation.

Though this issue of the *Journal* will not directly address all

of these questions it will seek to provide helpful starting points and explore possible paths that may be profitable for the thinking Christian. I have asked several theologians and musicians to address what I believe are important themes related to this subject.

As you read please realize that I have planned this issue with the assumption that God has given us an extensive and comprehensive philosophy of music that is revealed in the sacred Scripture. I believe this philosophy is flexible enough to allow for both cultural diversity and appropriate individuality, yet at the same time it is comprehensive enough to give solid principles for making sound judgments. Furthermore, this philosophy is theologically consistent enough to fit into a Judeo-Christian framework of thought and practice. In this introduction I would like to state several editorial presuppositions.

God Is the Master Musician and He Is Supremely Competent in the Arena of Music

As a seminary teacher of mine wrote several years ago, "God has created the raw materials that musicians work with. It is only logical to assume that He is superior in His musical perception, as infinitely beyond men in pitch and tone discrimination, as He is in wisdom and power."

Have you considered the simple fact that all three members of the triune Godhead sing? The Father is said to sing over His people: "He will rejoice over you with singing" (Zeph. 3:17, NIV). The Son of God sings with His disciples: "And after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives" (Matt. 26:30). It also appears that the Son of God sings over us (i.e., His people) even now. Hebrews 2:12, using Psalm 22:22, says, "I will proclaim Thy name to My brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing Thy praise." The Holy Spirit sings within the heart of each of God's elect, according to Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, both primary texts studied in this issue.

Scripture Provides Abundant Evidence of God's Interest in Music

As an example of my point, note that music often accompanies what God does. Listen to God's answer to Job out of the whirlwind:

Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now gird up your loins like a man, and I will ask you, and you instruct Me! Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, who set its measurements, since you know? Or who stretched the line on it? On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (Job 38: 2-7).

When the Lord Jesus returns His arrival will be heralded by a trumpet blast (1 Cor. 15:52), and the picture of praise given to the Lamb in the final day includes a multitude who are saying (singing?): "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns" (Rev. 19:6b). The psalmist, often praising God with music, says, "God has ascended with a shout, the Lord, with the sound of a trumpet" (Ps. 47: 5).

Another example can be seen in this: God Himself inspires song. We note this in Habbakuk 3 as well as in the frequent references to God's part in song found in the Psalter. It is a function of God's work among His redeemed people to lead them into song as a part of their intentional praise.

In addition to both of these observations we should note further that God actually commands the use of music in our praise of Him. This can be seen in 1 Chronicles 25:1-7, Psalm 100 and Psalm 150. These texts must be interpreted in their proper context and understood with reference to the simplicity of the New Covenant under which we now worship God, but their basic intent is plain. The latter Psalm tells God's ancient people that they should:

Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord in His sanctuary;
 Praise Him in His mighty expanse.
 Praise Him for His mighty deeds;
 Praise Him according to His excellent greatness.
 Praise Him with trumpet sound;
 Praise Him with harp and lyre.
 Praise Him with timbrel and dancing;
 Praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe.
 Praise Him with loud cymbals.
 Praise Him with resounding cymbals.
 Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.
 Praise the Lord!

Is it not reasonable to conclude that God expects us to serve Him with our music and to do so in a way that is consistent with His divine revelation and the covenantal direction of the testament now in place?

I suggest that Christians have no choice but to be deeply concerned about music, especially the music that is used in their churches. This is true, if for no other reason than that half of what we do in public praise involves music. Surely this fact alone urges us to take seriously the music of our churches if we desire to reform them biblically.

Under the Old Covenant the Levites were set apart to function as both priests and musicians. The goals and functions of their music were plainly determined by Yahweh Himself. Even the song book was divinely given. If this was true under the old dispensation then the church, worshipping under the more basic and simple plan of the New Covenant, without all the shadows and types, must at least develop a philosophy of music from the Scriptures and not merely from personal taste and cultural bias.

A number of approaches to music fall short of this biblical perspective. Let me share just a few. For one, music should not be rooted in the tastes of the people through a kind of democratic principle. If this is the case, we sing and play what

appeals to the group at hand, and the result will be composition that usually lacks theological concern and musical depth.

Second, it seems to me that we must not sing and play, as an end in itself, what simply "preserves our particular heritage." Scripture will not endorse the idea that the *primary* function of our music is the preservation of heritage, as important as that heritage may be.

Third, it should be obvious that the place of music in the church is not *entertainment!* Such an approach treats music as a kind of escape valve. Music can certainly have a place for entertaining us elsewhere, but worship is never conceived of as entertainment in the whole of Scripture.

Finally, any philosophy that treats music as an end in itself is suspect and unhelpful. This is the "art for art's sake" idea. It often drives certain churches that take great pride in their "high cultural" approach to liturgy and form in music. The answer to this is simple: Art for Christ's sake is our goal!

When all is said and done we must ask, "What then is music?" I answer: Music is modified and enriched communication which uses pitch, harmony, length of sound, etc. It does this in order to provide supportive interpretation of verbal text and/or instrumentation to stir the human soul toward imagination, thought and humanness. It is a form of exposition, if properly understood. It expounds through description and presentation of themes. In meaningful music, things are repeated, contrasted, compared and built toward a definite climax. Instrumentation enriches and provides proper human expression. Music allows for variety, which aids us in seeing the truth more profoundly. It allows for thinking and feeling to unite in a proper manner. It becomes a medium of true interpersonal communication with other human beings and with the Divine Being.

Think about this for a moment. Why do lovers often sing to one another? Is it not to draw out the expression of their thoughts and feelings? To express themselves with more

humanness? In this they reflect the glory of God in differing ways. God has filled this world with sounds and pitch of all types. There is meaning in all of this. Man exercises a certain function of his dominion over the creation through his making and using of music (Gen. 1:26). In the worship of God man uses this special gift in a most direct and sacred manner. My prayer is that we who influence the church will seek after God and praise Him in accord with His revealed Word. My hope is that we will make good and proper use of music for the glory of God.

Soli Deo Gloria!

Editor
