

The National Synod of Middleburg, in 1581, declared against it, and the Synod of Holland and Zealand, in 1594, adopted this strong resolution: 'That they would endeavour to obtain of the magistrate the laying aside of organs, and the singing with them in churches, even out of the time of worship, either before or after sermons'. The Provincial Synod of Dort also inveighed severely against their use.

Some testimonies are added from distinguished continental theologians. Pareus, commenting on I Corinthians 14:7 says: 'In the Christian church the mind must be incited in spiritual joy, not by pipes and trumpets and timbrels, with which God formerly indulged his ancient people on account of the hardness of their hearts, but by psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.' Zepperus in *De Legge Mosaitica*, Lib. IV says, 'Instrumental music in the religious worship of the Jews, belonged to the ceremonial law, which was abolished. It is evident that it is contrary to the precept and rule of Paul, who (1 Corinthians 14) wills that in Christian assemblies everything should be done for edification, that others may understand and be reformed; so that even of speaking in unknown tongues should be banished from church; much less should that jarring organic music, which produceth a gabbling of many voices, be allowed, with its pipes, trumpets and whistles, making our churches resound, nay, bellow and roar'

This is a brief synopsis of Girardeau's argument that musical instruments are unscriptural and unhistorical. Should not, therefore, Christians world-wide cease to use them?

*Girardeau John L., Instrumental Music in Public Worship, NCPs, 1983.*

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## INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN THE PUBLIC WORSHIP OF GOD

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### *The testimony of Scripture*



J.L. Girardeau



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## Instrumental music in the worship of God

All Christians seek to worship God in a manner that is acceptable, some say that this excludes all forms that are not commanded, while others restrict their practice to exclude only what has been expressly forbidden. This is the difference between those holding to the Regulative Principle and those in other churches and cultures who do not. It is impossible to argue that the difference, being cultural, is unresolvable.

The sole arbiter in all doctrinal discussion must be the Word of God. He is the same yesterday, today and forever and his Word and revelation is complete. That completed revelation must provide the focus of discussion. If those supporting the Regulative Principle are able to demonstrate from Scripture that God requires it then it is binding upon all men regardless of creed, nationality or colour. This idea was a cornerstone of the Reformation.

The doctrine of the sufficiency of scripture is vital. Cunningham says that the argument from tradition is a denial of the all sufficiency and supremacy of scripture and an attempt at preventing serious study of the sacred Word (Vol 1., Historical Theology (paraphrased)). The Dutch theologian Wilhelmus a Brakel puts it more firmly, 'All traditions which are extrabiblical are inventions and institutions of men. There are no traditions which have been handed down to us by Christ and the apostles. Never does Christ or an apostle direct us to unwritten traditions, but always to the Word (cf. Isaiah. 8:20, Luke 16:29, John 5:39, 2 Pet 1:19-20). God condemns all institutions of men. 'But in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men' (Matthew 15:9)' (Christian Reasonable Service, Vol 1.: 37). Kersten adds, even though he supported instruments, 'From Adam for about 2,500 years this revelation was preserved from falsification by the special care of God, and by tradition was

transmitted from fathers to the children. Tradition ended, however, when God committed His revealed Word to writing. Rome errs when it gives the authority of Scripture to traditions, which are only stories of men, and must be distinguished entirely from the truths revealed by God and passed on as tradition.' (Reformed Dogmatics, Vol. 1 :.21). This serves to re-emphasise the Reformation doctrine sola scriptura, i.e. that Scripture alone is the suitable ground upon which to conduct discussion and that tradition is a valueless argument, unless scripture backing can be found for a position.

Having dispensed with the Romish argument of tradition, we need to examine the Bible as to whether it supports an ambivalent position towards the methods used in divine worship, or a regulated mode that excludes the use of instruments.

The scriptures provide the Christian with the necessary rule of faith and practice (2 Timothy 3:16). This text shows doctrine, worship and practice fall under the command of Scripture, the logical inference being that they exclude all that is not commanded. Numbers 15:39-40 instructs the believer to worship God in the manner that He has commanded and not after the will of their own heart. Exodus 25:40 shows that as the Israelites were engaged in the construction of the Tabernacle (i.e. the construction of the House of God and the manner in which He would be worshipped) they were only to do those things that they had been commanded. The necessity of following only what had been commanded in Tabernacle worship can also be seen in Hebrews 8:5.

The importance of following God's commands and not the pious inventions of one's own imaginations are seen in Deuteronomy 4:2, Deuteronomy 12:32, Proverbs 30:5-6, Isaiah 8:20, Daniel 2:44, Matthew 15:6, Matthew 28:19-20, Colossians 2:20-23, 2 Timothy 3:16,

Revelation 22:18-19. These are texts that are full of solemn warnings to those people who, although with good intentions, do not worship God in the manner that he has prescribed. Instrumental music is not prescribed, therefore, it is expressly forbidden. Cain (Genesis 4) offered sacrifices to God in a manner that had not been commanded, and it was not respected. Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1-3) offered worship to God in a manner that had not been commanded and they were consumed. Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Numbers 16) sought to do that which had been forbidden (as music is by inference) and they perished. Moses (Numbers 20) used his own judgement in what would be acceptable to God, as music supporters do, and was judged. Saul (1 Samuel 13) offered a sacrifice to God at Gilgal in a manner not commanded, and he was judged. Uzza (1 Chronicles 13:7-8, 15:11-15) did what he thought was for the good of the cause of God, but which had been forbidden, and he died for his actions. Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:16-21) acted in a way that had not been commanded and was punished with leprosy. Ahaz (2 Chronicles 28:3-5) did both that which was forbidden and that which was not commanded and he was visited with divine vengeance. Is it not plain throughout scripture that if something has not been commanded then it is a dangerous and deceitful practice? Even when done with pious intentions, it often receives divine judgement.

Whatever may be the practice in recent times in the churches of Holland, the Synods of the Reformed Dutch Church, soon after the Reformation, pronounced very decidedly against the use of instrumental music in public worship.