

# ASSESSING THE EVIDENCE OFFERED FOR THE USE OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN EARLY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Ashby L. Camp

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## Introduction

As I document in "[Music in Christian Worship](#)," historians of music and of the early church overwhelmingly recognize that instrumental music was not employed in Christian worship for many centuries. Everett Ferguson, editor of the *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* and an internationally respected church historian, summarized the situation in "[Congregational Singing in the Early Church](#)" (p. 24), a paper presented at a symposium in June 2007:

It probably goes without saying in this context that the singing in the early church was unaccompanied by instrumental music. This fact is recognized by nearly all historians of church music and of Christianity in the ancient and early Medieval periods. . . . There is no evidence for the use of a musical instrument in the congregational assemblies of early Christians. The congregational singing was not accompanied by a musical instrument. The only instrument used was the human voice.

Most proponents of instrumental worship acknowledge this uniform absence of instrumental music from Christian assemblies but argue it was for some reason other than a theological objection to its use. I think that argument fails, for reasons I have given elsewhere, but here I focus on the relatively few instrumental advocates who, though often lacking expertise in the field, deny the scholarly consensus. They claim there is abundant evidence of Christians worshiping with musical instruments throughout the church's first millennium, so there is no absence of use to explain. They are either unaware or unfazed by the fact so many specialists in the field deny that the familiar texts they cite have the import they claim. They simply provide a partisan perspective on isolated texts and declare victory, treating the careful historical research of generations of scholars like an urban legend they are deigning to expose.

In this paper I assess the evidence that is offered in support of the claim musical instruments were used in early Christian worship. I have run across this evidence in various places, but the most complete itemization I have seen is Phillip Kayser, [Musical Instruments in Worship: A Critique of the Non-Instrumentalist Position](#) (Omaha, NE: Phillip Kayser, 2010), 57-74. I do not address texts I consider to be so obviously irrelevant that their potential to mislead is slight or that are covered in principle by other responses. I conclude the evidence does not establish the claim asserted, which explains why the scholarly consensus exists despite that evidence.

## Specific Evidence Offered

### **1. Ignatius assumes it is appropriate to worship Christ with instrumental accompaniment.**

Early in the second century, Ignatius of Antioch was arrested and taken to Rome for judgment. While at Smyrna, en route to Rome, he wrote a letter to the church in Ephesus in which he stated (chapter 4) (translation from *Ante-Nicene Fathers* Vol. 1, revised and edited by Kevin Knight):

Wherefore it is fitting that you should run together in accordance with the will of your bishop, which thing also you do. For your justly renowned presbytery, worthy of God, is fitted as exactly to the bishop as the strings are to the harp. Therefore in your concord and harmonious love, Jesus Christ is sung. And man by man, become a choir, that being harmonious in love, and taking up the song of God in unison, you may with one voice sing to the Father through Jesus Christ, so that He may both hear you, and perceive by your works that you are indeed the members of His Son. It is profitable, therefore, that you should live in an unblameable unity, that thus you may always enjoy communion with God.

There is no assumption here that it is appropriate to worship Christ with instrumental accompaniment. The reference to the strings of a harp is unambiguously a simile illustrating how the presbytery is properly related to the bishop. It is in this unity and love that the church with one voice sings praises to the Father through Jesus Christ. As Clayton Jefford explains in *Reading the Apostolic Fathers: A Student's Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 56, "In Ephesians 4 and Romans 2.2 Ignatius offers the image of the harp and its strings as a metaphor for Christian unity under the authority of the bishop and his presbyters. He urges all members of the church to join in the choir of these unified voices in order to facilitate community harmony as a single voice through Jesus Christ."

The noun *symphōnia*, which is used in Lk. 15:25, does not appear in chapter 4 of Ignatius's letter. Rather, the adjective *symphōnos* is used twice. It has no connotation of musical instruments. *Symphōnos* is defined in Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 961, the standard Greek lexicon, as "being in tune with, *attuned to*, *harmonious*" and "being in agreement, *agreeing*." It is defined in Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 3:290, as "in agreement, harmonious." That is why it is rendered "harmonious" in the above translation.

### **2. The *Odes of Solomon* establishes the use of instrumental music in early Christian worship.**

*Odes of Solomon* is a collection of 42 odes or psalms (only 41 are extant), two editions of which were published in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century – by James Rendel Harris and then F. C. Burkitt –

based on the discovery of separate manuscripts. As Cornelia Horn notes in her contribution to *Studia Patristica Vol. XL* (Louvain: Peeters Publishers, 2006), 415-416:

Ever since their discovery, debates have continued regarding almost every aspect surrounding them, be that questions of authorship, function of the author, dating, original language, place of origin, or intended audience. . . . Debates have also continued over the original religious setting from which these hymns emerged – Jewish, Gnostic, or Christian.

It sometimes is asserted confidently that *Odes* was written in Syriac in the late first or early second century, and yet Charles Kannengiesser declares in "Odes of Solomon" in James Hoover, ed. *Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2014), 2:950, "It seems certain that the 42 Odes were originally written in Greek, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c." Simon Gathercole says of *Odes*, "the original language (Greek or Syriac) is very much a bone of contention" (*The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012], 38), and the F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1516 says about the date of composition "the late 2<sup>nd</sup> cent. seems most likely."

The references of possible relevance to the use of instrumental music are in Odes 6, 7, 14, and 26. The text for each of these odes has weak manuscript support. Odes 6, 7, and 14 are known from only one fifteenth-century Syriac manuscript; Ode 26 is known from an additional tenth-century Syriac manuscript. The lateness and paucity of manuscripts and the strong possibility of a Greek original warn against putting too much weight on the precise wording of a text. Craig Evans, reviewing Michael Lattke's commentary on *Odes*, states, "I agree with Lattke's reasoning; Greek was probably the original language, but the precise form of the Greek is beyond recovery" ("Review of Lattke, Michael. The Odes of Solomon," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* [vol. 21, no. 3, 2011], 436).

James Charlesworth translates the relevant verses from *Odes* as follows:

6:1-2 – As the wind glides through the harp and the strings speak,  
So the Spirit of the Lord speaks through my members, and I speak through His love.

7:17 – To announce to those who have songs of the coming of the Lord, that they may go forth to meet Him and may sing to Him, with joy and with the harp of many tones.

14:8 – And open to me the harp of Your Holy Spirit, so that with every note I may praise You, O Lord.

26:3 – For His harp is in my hand, and the odes of His rest shall not be silent.

In Ode 6:1-2 the Spirit speaking through the poet's bodily members is analogized to the strings of a kithara speaking by means of an external influence (a hand or wind). The "kithara of many voices/tones" in Ode 7:17 is probably a reference to the melodious sound of multiple voices in unison (e.g., Rev. 14:2-3). It is a single metaphorical harp consisting of the harmony of

many voices. The appeal in Ode 14:8 is for the poet's voice to become an instrument of the Spirit consistent with the imagery of 6:1-2 (see also 7:25 and 16:5). As Andrew McGowan recognizes, "The *Odes of Solomon* speaks of a divine kithara that will enable the devotee to praise God with 'all the tones' (14.7 [sic, 14:8]) – spiritually, by implication, but not with literal strings" (*Ancient Christian Worship* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014], 122).

As for the statement in Ode 26:3 that "his kithara is in my hand," it is impossible to know if a Greek original read simply "I have his kithara," meaning a voice for divine praise, and was paraphrased in translation (or edited in copying) similar to how some English translations have paraphrased Rev. 15:2 by adding "in their hands" or "given them by." But even as it stands, it very likely is a metaphorical way of saying the Spirit had readied him to issue heartfelt praise, had rendered him a suitable instrument for the Lord's exaltation.

Instruments commonly were used metaphorically, so there is every reason to expect such usage in a poetic text like this one. Charlesworth acknowledges the potential for metaphorical usage "since in many texts (including the Dead Sea Scrolls *and the Odes*) an author confesses that his heart or tongue is 'his' instrument, harp, or flute" ("[A Conversation with Professor James Charlesworth on the 'Odes of Solomon'](#)"). In *Simple and Bold: Ephrem's Art of Symbolic Thought* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006), 116-117, Kees den Biesen speaks of Ephrem's metaphorical use of the harp, wherein Ephrem praises the Lord for being the true harpist who plays him as the harp. He then writes, "In the *Odes of Solomon* 6,1-2; 14,7-8 and 26,1-4 similar use is made of the imagery of the harp." John Smith says of ode 26:3 in *Music in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 171:

It is tempting to see the reference to the 'kithara . . . in my hand' in the latter passage [*Odes Sol.* 26:3] as implying that the poet played the instrument while he sang the odes. But the former passage [*Odes Sol.* 14:7-8] shows that the *kithara* is a metaphor for the Holy Spirit. The latter passage extends the metaphor by saying the *kithara* is 'in [the poet's] hand'; in other words, the Holy Spirit (traditionally seen in Christianity as a medium of the Deity's creative energy) is available to the poet to use in his praise of the Lord. The sense of the beginning of the last verse quoted above [For his kithara is in my hand] should probably be something along the lines of: 'For the Holy Spirit is mine'.

Taking the reference literally would render inexplicable the broad evidence against the use of instruments in Christian worship. It does not help to claim that *Odes of Solomon* predates the evidence against the use of instruments. Not only is that early dating uncertain, but if instrumental music was used without objection in the churches of the first and early second centuries certainly that practice would have required an explanation as the church shifted to its universally noninstrumental stance, just as the church felt obligated to explain the use of instruments in the Old Testament. But this alleged early acceptance of instrumental practice is never mentioned.

**3. Justin Martyr says in his *Dialogue with Trypho* that the Spirit commands the inhabitants of all the earth to sing and play the harp to the God and Father of all.**

In Chapter 74 of Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin is challenged by Trypho to justify his claim that Ps. 96:1-3 (95:1-3 in LXX) refers to Christ and not to the Father alone. Justin responds by calling for Trypho to pay attention to what the Spirit said in the Psalm:

And I answered, "Attend to me, I beseech you, while I speak of the statement which the Holy Spirit gave utterance to in this Psalm; and you shall know that I speak not sinfully, and that we are not really bewitched; for so you shall be enabled of yourselves to understand many other statements made by the Holy Spirit. 'Sing unto the Lord a new song; sing unto the Lord, *all the earth: sing [adō] unto the Lord, and bless [eulogeō] His name*; show forth His salvation from day to day, His wonderful works among all people.'

Keying on the word "salvation," Justin argues that in the Psalm the Spirit is commanding the inhabitants of all the earth who know this mystery of salvation, the suffering of Christ, to *adō* and *psallō* to the God and Father of all things.

He bids the inhabitants of *all the earth*, who have known the mystery of this salvation, i.e., the suffering of Christ, by which He saved them, *adontas kai psallontas* to God the Father of all things, and recognise that He is to be praised [*ainetos*] and feared, and that He is the Maker of heaven and earth, who effected this salvation in behalf of the human race, who also was crucified and was dead, and who was deemed worthy by Him (God) to reign over all the earth.

So Justin clearly is using *adō* and *psallō* to describe what the Spirit in the Psalm is commanding the inhabitants of earth to do. But notice that in the Psalm the Spirit commands all the earth to *adō* and *eulogeō*; *psallō* is nowhere used. Therefore, Justin is using *psallō* as a synonym for *eulogeō* (praise, bless, extol), for otherwise the Spirit does not call for it in the Psalm. This shows that Justin's focus is on the verbal aspect of *psallō* and not on instrumental accompaniment. This comports with the verb's range in first-century usage, as documented in Everett Ferguson, *A Cappella Music*, rev. ed. (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1988), 1-27 and given in BDAG, 1096. This usage is reflected in standard English versions of Justin's work.

Thomas B. Falls renders the key section in *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1948; paperback reprint 2008), 6:266:

With these words he commands all those inhabitants of this globe who know this mystery of salvation (the Passion of Christ), through which He saved them, *to sing out and constantly praise the Father of all*, since they realize He is both to be feared and to be praised, and is the Creator of heaven and earth, who redeemed mankind, who, after He died on the cross, was deemed worthy by Him to reign over the whole world.

Marcus Dods and George Reith translate it as follows in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library* (Edinburgh: T & T Clarke, 1867), 2:191:

He bids the inhabitants of all the earth, who have known the mystery of this salvation, i.e., the suffering of Christ, by which He saved them, *sing and give praises to God the Father of all things*, and recognise that He is to be praised and feared, and that He is the

Maker of heaven and earth, who effected this salvation in behalf of the human race, who also was crucified and was dead, and who was deemed worthy by Him (God) to reign over all the earth.

Henry Brown translates it as follows in *Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* (Cambridge: Deighton's; Macmillan, Barclay, and Macmillan, 1846; first published 1745), 157:

He enjoins those who throughout the whole earth know the mystery of salvation, that is, the passion of Christ through which God hath saved them, *continually to persevere in singing praises to the God Father of all things*; acknowledging that he is to be greatly praised and feared, and that he is the Maker of heaven and earth, who contrived this salvation for the advantage of mankind, namely, him who, after his death and crucifixion, was thought worthy of the honour of being appointed by him to be the king of the whole earth.

In addition, the ability to play a harp is possessed by few (e.g., 1 Sam. 16:16). If Justin was claiming that the Spirit in this Psalm commanded the inhabitants of all the earth to "play the harp" to God, certainly this interpretation would have raised questions about both its correctness and how it was to be obeyed. The fact we have no evidence of any discussion along those lines is telling. Moreover, if someone of the stature of Justin had claimed Christians were obligated to play the harp to God, it is inconceivable his teaching would have been ignored by the raft of later theologians who made clear instruments were not part of Christian worship.

The suggestion that Justin's use of *psallō* must carry an instrumental connotation because its juxtaposition with *adō* would otherwise render it redundant is incorrect. This same argument in the context of Eph. 5:19 is summarily dismissed in Moisés Silva, ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 4:719: "there is little reason to think that a significant distinction between the two verbs is intended." The latter simply emphasizes that the singing is to be praise.

#### **4. The second-century critic Celsus accused Christians of whipping their hearers into a frenzy with flute music, and Origen did not deny it.**

Around A.D. 175, the Roman philosopher Celsus wrote a full-scale attack on Christianity titled *The True Doctrine*. That work is lost, but we know of it because the Christian philosopher and theologian Origen quoted it extensively when he rebutted it around A.D. 250 in a work titled *Against Celsus*.

There are two lines of textual tradition for *Against Celsus*. One is represented by the thirteenth-century Vatican manuscript (Vatic. Gr. 386 = A), which contains the complete work. The other is represented by the *Philocalia*, the anthology of passages from Origen's works composed in the fourth century, the earliest manuscripts of which are from the tenth (Patmos manuscript) and eleventh (Venice 47) centuries. The first complete translation of *Against Celsus* into English was that of Frederick Crombie and W. H. Cairns for the Ante-Nicene Christian Library (1869-1872). It was based on the edition of the Greek text prepared by Charles and Vincent de la Rue (also written Delarue) in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The current standard text is that

prepared by Paul Koetschau at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This text, with some emendations, was the basis of Henry Chadwick's translation published in 1953 and R. Joseph Hoffman's translation of his reconstruction of Celsus's work published in 1987.

The claim is based on Book III, section 16 of *Against Celsus*. The differences between Crombie's and Chadwick's translations are significant. Crombie renders his text as follows, the most relevant portion being highlighted:

But what the legends are of every kind which we gather together, or the terrors which we invent, as Celsus without proof asserts, he who likes may show. . . . What terrors, then, if you except the doctrine of punishment, do we invent and impose upon mankind? *And if he should reply that we weave together erroneous opinions drawn from ancient sources, and trumpet them aloud, and sound them before men, as the priests of Cybele clash their cymbals in the ears of those who are being initiated in their mysteries;* we shall ask him in reply, Erroneous opinions from what ancient sources? For, whether he refers to Grecian accounts, which taught the existence of courts of justice under the earth, or Jewish, which, among other things, predicted the life that follows the present one; he will be unable to show that we who, striving to believe in grounds of reason, regulate our lives in conformity with such doctrines, have failed correctly to ascertain the truth.

Chadwick renders his text as follows in *Contra Celsum* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 137-138:

Let anyone who likes show what sort of miscellaneous ideas we use to persuade men to follow us, or what terrors we invent, as Celsus writes, though he gives no proof. . . . If, then, you except the doctrine of punishment, what terrors do we invent that we may persuade men to follow us? *Furthermore he says that with these we combine misunderstandings of the ancient tradition, and we overwhelm men beforehand by playing flutes and music like the priests of Cybele who with their clamour stupefy the people whom they wish to excite into a frenzy.* We reply to him: What sort of ancient tradition is it of which we have misunderstandings? Whether he means the Greek tradition which taught the existence of law-courts under the earth, or the Jewish which among other things prophesied about the life following this one, he would not be able to prove we have misunderstood the truth, and that we live according to doctrines of this nature – not, at any rate, those of us who endeavor to believe rationally."

Hoffman renders the key phrase this way in *On the True Doctrine: A Discourse Against the Christians* (Oxford, 1987), 71: "I have heard that before their ceremonies, where they expand on their misunderstanding of the ancient traditions, they excite their hearers to the point of frenzy with flute music like that heard among the priests of Cybele."

I have not tracked down the extent to which the differences are matters of text or translation, but in Crombie's translation the presentation of allegedly erroneous Christian teaching is *analogized* to the way priests of Cybele clash cymbals in the ears of their initiates. There is no claim that Christians used musical instruments to anesthetize the reasoning of those they teach, as there is in the translations of Chadwick and Hoffman.



But even if one accepts that Celsus did in fact charge Christians with using flute music to induce a frenzied state prior to their meetings, there is reason to doubt he meant that literally. It sounds like a stock cultural insult of any who would persuade others to embrace foolishness, a way of saying they break down people's defense of reason as part of their selling method, like the notorious priests of Cybele. Origen says in response that no disarming of reason is required because Christian teaching is not based on a rejection of truth and Christians are not governed by irrational base impulses.

If one insists Celsus was claiming that Christians literally disarmed people's faculties by whipping them into a frenzy with flute music, his polemical interest in the claim makes him an unreliable source, all the more so given there is no indication of the basis for his belief and the fact all sorts of lies about Christians circulated in the second century. Justin Martyr wrote his *First Apology* from Rome around A.D. 155, only about twenty years before Celsus, who probably also lived in Rome, wrote his attack on Christianity. In that work, Justin provides firsthand testimony of a Christian gathering, and Celsus's frenzy-inducing flute players are nowhere to be found.

Assuming Celsus made such a claim (contra Crombie) and assuming it was not a stock trope, Origen's response does not mean he accepted the charge as true. This argument proves too much, as it has Origen accepting as true not only that Christians used flutes but that they did so to stupefy those they were teaching. It is more reasonable to think Origen chose to address the substance of the charge, that Christian teaching is so foolish in its rejection of "established truths" (ancient tradition) that it could only be swallowed by one whose faculties had been impaired, rather than to deny the specifically alleged method of stupefaction. In saying Christians have no need for stupefaction because they teach truth, he rebutted implicitly the charge that they employed flutes for that purpose.

And notice that this musical stupefaction is said to take place beforehand (Chadwick), before their ceremonies or meetings (Hoffman). So even if Celsus had credible information on the matter, he is speaking of conduct outside the assembly. It was, according to Celsus, a prelude to the gathering, a kind of mystical brainwashing to make the people receptive to nonsense.

## **5. Clement of Alexandria taught that it was not blameworthy for Christians to play and sing to the accompaniment of the kithara and lyre.**

In chapter IV of Book II of his work *Paedagogos* ("Instructor"), the Christian writer and teacher Clement of Alexandria addresses how Christians are to conduct themselves at banquets or feasts. This writing is generally dated to A.D. 190 - 200, and even though it is not dealing with a worship assembly, it implies clearly that musical instruments were not used in those assemblies. (The translation is from Vol. 4 of *Ante-Nicene Christian Library* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1867], 215-217.)

Clement first describes the sensuous music of pagan entertainment:

Let revelry keep away from our rational entertainments, . . . For if people occupy their time with pipes, and psalteries, and choirs, and dances, and Egyptian clapping of hands, and such disorderly frivolities, they become quite immodest and intractable, beat on cymbals and drums, and make a noise on instruments of delusion; for plainly such a banquet, as seems to me, is a theatre of drunkenness.

And then, in contrast to that, he quotes from Psalm 150 and gives it an allegorical interpretation. (I substitute the more accurate rendering "kithara" for "lyre.")

The Spirit, distinguishing from such revelry the divine service, sings, "Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet"; for with the sound of the trumpet He shall raise the dead. "Praise Him on the psaltery"; for the tongue is the psaltery of the Lord. "And praise Him on the [kithara]." By the [kithara] is meant the mouth struck by the Spirit, as it were by a plectrum. "Praise with the timbrel and dance," refers to the Church meditating on the resurrection of the dead in the resounding skin. "Praise Him on the chords and organ." Our body he calls an organ, and its nerves are the strings, by which it has received harmonious tension, and when struck by the Spirit it gives forth human voices. "Praise Him on the clashing cymbals." He calls the tongue the cymbal of the mouth, which resounds with the pulsation of the lips. Therefore He cried to humanity, "Let every breath praise the Lord," because He cares for every breathing thing which he hath made. For man is truly a pacific instrument; while other instruments, if you investigate, you will find to be warlike, inflaming to lusts, or kindling up amours, or rousing wrath.

After noting that the trumpet, the pipe, the pectides, the lyre, the flute, the horn, the drum, and the cymbal all are used by various groups in warfare, Clement writes:

The one instrument of peace, the Word alone by which we honour God, is what we employ. We no longer employ the ancient psaltery, and trumpet, and timbrel, and flute, which those expert in war and contemnners of the fear of God were wont to make use of also in the choruses at their festive assemblies; that by such strains they might raise their dejected minds.

At one point, Clement makes a statement that some claim expresses approval of the use of two specific instruments, the kithara and lyre. But as James McKinnon states in *Music in Early Christian Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 33:

Here in a frequently quoted passage, 'if you should wish to sing and play to the cithara and lyre, this is not blameworthy,' Clement seems to contradict all that goes before and to condone the use of these instruments. But surely the immediate context of the passage as well as Clement's views in general suggest that it is to be read allegorically.

An allegorical reading of the passage is supported by the fact Clement earlier in the same essay allegorizes the kithara as meaning the mouth struck by the Spirit and identifies the lyre as an instrument of war that contrasts with the one instrument of peace, the Word alone, by which

Christians honor God; and immediately after the statement in question he allegorizes the psaltery as referring to Jesus. In addition, in an earlier work titled *Protrepticus*, Clement described Jesus as "scorning the lyre and kithara as lifeless instruments."

But even if Clement's reference was intended literally, he is speaking of conduct in a banquet or feast not in a worship assembly, so one could not conclude that these instruments were present in the church (especially in light of the other evidence of their absence). As McKinnon states in *The Temple, the Church Fathers, and Early Western Chant* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate, 1998), chapter IV, 71 (fn. 4), "If [Clement's statement] was meant to be a real toleration of these instruments, *it was intended for extra-liturgical devotion rather than for liturgical singing* and probably to accompany a non-Biblical metrical hymn rather than a psalm" (emphasis supplied).

Conduct that was acceptable at a social banquet cannot be assumed to be acceptable when the church was assembled in Jesus' name. The assembly is where God meets with his people *as a people*, and without denying that intimate communion with God is available for saints at other times, there is something spiritually distinctive about that encounter. Not only do we as an assembled body proclaim Jesus' redeeming death through our sharing in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:26) but Paul indicates that the power of the Lord was present in a distinct way when the Corinthians were assembled in the Lord's name (1 Cor. 5:4; see also Mat. 18:20). He also suggests that angels were present in (or at least watching over) the Corinthians' worship assembly (1 Cor. 11:10).

The early church certainly perceived its gatherings as having a unique spiritual dimension. Larry Hurtado says in *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Earliest Christian Devotion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 50, "They experienced their assemblies as not merely human events but as having a transcendent dimension. They sensed God as directly and really present in their meetings through his Spirit."

The distinctiveness of the congregational assembly is reflected in the fact that not everything that is permissible outside the assembly is permissible within it. As Everett Ferguson explains in *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 243:

The assembly of the church is a distinctive expression of the church. Not everything acceptable in other contexts has a place in the church meeting. Paul in 1 Corinthians indicates that there are times when "the whole church comes together" (1 Cor. 14:23), "when you come together as a church" [or "in church"] (1 Cor. 11:18; cf. 11:20). Special considerations apply for these occasions. Paul makes a distinction between behavior that is appropriate elsewhere and what can be done in the assembly; between outside activities and assembly activities. Thus, he distinguishes eating to satisfy hunger "at home" and coming together "to eat the Lord's Supper" (1 Cor. 11:20, 22, 33-34). Again, although he claimed to speak in tongues more than all the Corinthians (1 Cor. 14:18) and says he would like for all of them to be able to speak in tongues (1 Cor. 14:5), he yet declares, "in church I would rather speak five words with my mind, in order to instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue" (1 Cor. 14:19). Furthermore, he does not impose

permanent silence on women, only "in the churches [assemblies] women should be silent" (1 Cor. 14:34). Paul does not support the idea that if something is right or good at other times it may be done in the church.

Taking Clement's reference literally simply would mean that one could not make from Clement an *a fortiori* argument for the *absence* of instruments in the church (the argument that if they were not used in banquets then certainly they were not used in church) because the predicate for that argument, their total exclusion from the banquet, would have been undermined. However, apart from the *a fortiori* argument, Clement's statements still indicate the absence of instruments from the worship assembly. As Charles H. Cosgrove explains in "Clement of Alexandria and Early Christian Music," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14:3 (2006) 269:

Beyond this fleeting reference to the synaxis [a Christian gathering for worship], we are dependent on Clement's descriptions of music in other settings as a guide to his views about music in corporate worship. That evidence strongly suggests that music in the synaxis was purely vocal, without instrumental accompaniment. . . . His preference for calm, vocal music at the dinner party implies that he expected the same kind of song in church and probably found it there.

## 6. Polycrates of Ephesus had a ring with an emblem of a harp.

Polycrates was bishop of Ephesus in the late second century. In *Paedagogos* (III, xi), Clement of Alexandria discusses what emblems were appropriate for Christians on signet rings. After indicating the kinds of emblems that are inappropriate, he says (translation from Chadwick), "Let our signets be a dove or a fish, or a ship running before the wind, or a musician's lyre (which Polycrates used) or a ship's anchor (which Seleucus had engraved on his seal)." In "The Harp at Ephesus," *The Expository Times* (Feb 1963), 156, John Foster contended that Clement's Polycrates was the bishop of Ephesus. He then tried to stretch that alleged association into evidence that harps were used in the church at Ephesus.

Henry Chadwick responded to Foster's article with "The Ring of a Musical Bishop of Ephesus?" in *The Expository Times* (April 1963), 213-214. He there showed that Seleucus was no doubt King Seleucus I (c. 358-280 B.C.), who was known from historians to have had a ring on which an anchor was engraved. He concluded that the Polycrates to whom Clement referred "is, beyond all possible, probable shadow of doubt, the most famous of all bearers of that name in antiquity, the seventh century tyrant of Samos of whose signet ring Herodotus tells a very familiar story . . . In Clement's time every Alexandrian schoolboy would have known the story from Herodotus."

Of course, even if the bishop of Antioch in the late second century had a ring with a harp engraved on it, there is no reason to think he did so because the church there used musical instruments in worship. As early as Ignatius of Antioch the harp was used as a metaphor for Christian unity, so there is no reason to think it would not have a similar symbolic significance on the bishop's ring.

## 7. Hippolytus defined psalms, songs, psalms of songs, and songs of psalmody as involving musical instruments, so the singing Christians did in their assemblies must have been accompanied by musical instruments.

Hippolytus was a leading, albeit controversial, theologian in Rome in the first part of the third century. He was the last prominent writer of the Roman church to use Greek. *Fragments on the Psalms* is printed with editions of his writings, but it is placed among those works considered to be of doubtful authenticity (the *dubia*), and thus may be the work of a later author. Nevertheless, the author states in part in section I.7 of that writing:

As there are "psalms," and "songs," and "psalms of song," and "songs of psalmody," it remains that we discuss the difference between these. We think, then, that the "psalms" are those which are simply played to an instrument, without the accompaniment of the voice, and (which are composed) for the musical melody of the instrument; and that those are called "songs" which are rendered by the voice in concert with the music; and that they are called "psalms of song" when the voice takes the lead, while the appropriate sound is also made to accompany it, rendered harmoniously by the instruments; and "songs of psalmody," when the instrument takes the lead, while the voice has the second place, and accompanies the music of the strings.

It is a mistake to leap from these definitions to the conclusion the author was implying the use of musical instruments in Christian worship. Ferguson explains (*A Cappella Music*, 69):

Many passages in interpreting the Psalms define the different Greek words involving the *psal* root according to their etymology and so make reference to playing on an instrument. Musicologists and historians have not infrequently mistaken such statements for descriptions of contemporary practice, although recognizing that such flies in the face of all the other evidence and in some instances would contradict the other testimony of the authors cited. According to the etymology of the words and the practice of the Old Testament, the patristic definitions are quite correct. What is often overlooked is that the distinctions between the words being defined become the basis for an allegorical interpretation; there is no literal application to Christians. Moreover, it is never stated that the instructions being allegorized had anything to do with Christian worship.

In other words, the author is not referring to Christian worship but is laying the foundation by means of these definitions for asserting that Christians themselves become a spiritual analog of these things as they live for Christ. This is clear as one continues the quote from *Fragments on the Psalms*.

And thus much as to the letter of what is signified by these terms. But as to the mystical interpretation, it would be a "psalm" when, by smiting the instrument, viz. the body, with good deeds we succeed in good action though not wholly proficient in speculation; and a "song," when, by revolving the mysteries of the truth, apart from the practical, and assenting fully to them, we have the noblest thoughts of God and His oracles, while knowledge enlightens us, and wisdom shines brightly in our souls; and a "song of

psalmody," when, while good action takes the lead, according to the word, If you desire wisdom, keep the commandments, and the Lord shall give her unto you, we understand wisdom at the same time, and are deemed worthy by God to know the truth of things, till now kept hidden from us; and a "psalm of song," when, by revolving with the light of wisdom some of the more abstruse questions pertaining to morals, we first become prudent in action, and then also able to tell what, and when, and how action is to be taken.

Other writers, such as the fourth-century figures Didymus of Alexandria and Hilary of Poitiers, may vary the spiritual application, but the principle of allegorizing the Old Testament definitions is the same. Thus, regarding the definitions given by Hilary, McKinnon echoes Ferguson's warning (*Music in Early Christian Literature*, 124): "These 'four-genre designations have caused considerable confusion among musicologists. Much of this can be avoided simply by keeping in mind that they are exegetical in nature: they refer to Old Testament not contemporary Christian usage." As he wrote elsewhere, "A misunderstanding of the Church Fathers' allegorical exegesis of the instruments of the Psalms accounts for most misinterpretations" (*The Temple, the Church Fathers, and Early Western Chant*, chapter IV, 70).

Clearly these etymological definitions relate to the time of the Old Testament, as they contradict the regular Christian usage of "psalm" by denying it has any vocal element! Moreover, accepting this argument would mean Christians were everywhere using instruments in worship because they everywhere sang psalms and various songs, but that cannot be so given the uniform and vehement antagonism the Fathers of the early church displayed toward instruments.

When, for example, the fourth-century Cappadocian Father Basil the Great, in commenting on Psalm 44, distinguished a canticle from a psalm on the basis the former involved no instrumental music, he certainly was not implying that Christians employ instrumental music when they sing psalms. On the contrary, he would be opposed to the use of musical instruments in Christian worship, as made clear in his Commentary on Isaiah. Though some have questioned Basil's authorship of that work, the probability is very high that he wrote it (see Illaria Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis* [Leiden: Brill, 2013], 260 [fn. 226]).

In commenting on Isaiah 5:11-12, Basil vividly connects the public lyre playing of a young woman with immorality. He then contrasts the valuable arts with "the useless arts," among which he includes "kithara playing" and "aulos playing." Certainly he saw no room for such activity in the worship of the glorious Lord.

This is confirmed by the fact Gregory of Nazianzus, a contemporary and associate of Basil, made clear that instrumental music was characteristic of pagan celebration and had no place in Christian feasts or weddings (and thus certainly no place in Christian worship assemblies). He calls for Christian feasts to be celebrated "not surrounded by the sound of auloi and percussion"; they were to "take up hymns rather than tympana" (*Music in Early Christian Literature*, 71). At weddings he identifies "psalmody with aulos playing" among the things that cannot be mixed (*Music in Early Christian Literature*, 72).

## **8. In "The Epistle of Ignatius to the Antiochians," Pseudo-Ignatius greeted harp players as officers or servants within the church.**

The corpus of thirteen letters known as Pseudo-Ignatius is thought to have been written in the last half of the fourth century by an anonymous person in Syria. See, e.g., Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Dancing, clapping, meditating: Jewish and Christian observance of the Sabbath in Pseudo-Ignatius," in Benjamin Isaac and Yuval Shahar, eds., *Judaea-Palaestina, Babylon and Rome: Jews in Antiquity* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 29-30. In chapter 12 of "The Epistle to the Antiochians," the writer greets various officers and servants of the church, but he does not include harp players among them. That claim is based on a mistranslation of the word *psaltas* (plural accusative form of the masculine noun *psaltēs*). It means "singers" or "cantors," a position in the Catholic Church somewhat analogous to a song leader, not "harp players" or "musicians."

Lampe defines *psaltēs* in *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 1589, as "one who sings psalms in church, cantor," and this meaning is reflected in the translations of the word in "The Epistle to the Antiochians." It is rendered "the singers" in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), 1:112; "the cantors" by William Jurgens in *The Faith of the Fathers* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1970), 28; "psalm-singers" by Edward Foley in "The Cantor in Historical Perspective," *Worship* (May 1, 1982), 211; and "the cantors" by Mckinnon in *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 19.

It is unimaginable that harp players held an office in a Syrian church of the late fourth century. John Chrysostom was a leader of the church in Antioch at that time and was perhaps the greatest preacher of his day. He saw the use of musical instruments in the worship of the Old Testament as an accommodation to the spiritual dullness and weakness of the Jews (translation from Ferguson, *A Cappella Music*, 56):

I would say this [about the mention of instruments in Psalm 149], that in olden times they were thus led by these instruments because of the dullness of their understanding and their recent deliverance from idols. Just as God allowed animal sacrifices, so also he let them have these instruments, condescending to help their weakness.

McKinnon rightly observed in *The Temple, the Church Fathers, and Early Western Chant*, chapter IV, 77:

If it had ever occurred to Christian communities of the third and fourth centuries to add instruments to their singing, indignation over this would have resounded throughout patristic literature and ecclesiastical legislation. One can only imagine the outburst the situation would have evoked from, say, Jerome or *Chrysostom*.

## **9. Demons that attacked Anthony imitated the sounds of harp music which implies such music was used in Christian worship.**

Around A.D. 357, Athanasius of Alexandria wrote the *Life of Anthony*, a hagiographical (and polemical) account of the life of an Egyptian eremitic monk who died not long before. In

Athanasius's Greek rendering of what Anthony is said to have uttered in Coptic, Anthony warns a group of gathered monks about the wiles of demons. He says in chapter 25 that in addition to appearing in various forms demons also, without appearing, pretend (*prospoiontai*) *psallein met' hodēs*. Some claim this phrase refers to the demons "imitating the music of harp and voice" and argue the demons were doing so in accordance with the music of Christian worship. Thus, the demons through their attack on Anthony are said to reveal indirectly that harps were used in Christian assemblies. There is much wrong with this.

First, it is clear that Athanasius in other contexts used *psallō* simply for singing praises without any connotation of instrumental accompaniment. This is in keeping with common usage of the period (see, e.g., Ferguson, *A Cappella Music*, 18-27). For example, his *Epistle to Marcellinus* repeatedly uses *psallō* synonymously with *adō*, and he says in section 29 (translation from Ferguson, 25):

Those who do not read (aloud) the sacred songs in this manner do not sing [*psallousi*] with understanding . . . But those singing [*psallontes*] in the above described manner, so as to present the melody of the words from the rhythm of the soul and the harmony with the spirit, these sing [*psallousi*] with the tongue but make melody [*psallontes*] with the mind, and they profit greatly not only themselves but those who wish to hear them.

So the phrase in question is better translated as "they pretend to sing praises with a song" or "to make music with a song." McKinnon renders it, "they pretend to sing the psalms melodiously" (*Music in Early Christian Literature*, 55); Robert Gregg translates, "they pretend to chant with sacred songs" (*Athanasius: The Life of Anthony and Letter to Marcellinus* [Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980], 50). The rendering "play the harp" or "make the music of a harp" is anachronistic.

Second, it is quite possible the sounds Anthony interpreted as being created by demons were instead auditory hallucinations induced by the rigors of his asceticism. In that case, it would be a mistake to attribute the sounds to demons. It likewise would be a mistake to claim the hallucinations, assuming they included sounds of instruments, reflected the music of Christian worship. Since they were hallucinations they could have been a distortion or corruption of the Christian worship experience rather than an accurate reflection of it, much as happens in dreams. Indeed, we know instruments were not used in churches in this area at that time because a fourth-century Alexandrian law set excommunication as the penalty for a cantor who learned to play the kithara (*The Temple, the Church Fathers, and Early Western Chant*, chapter IV, 69): "If an anagnost [cantor] learns to play the kithara, he shall confess this. If he does not return to it, his punishment shall be for seven weeks' duration. If he persists, he shall be dismissed and excluded from the church."

And finally, even if demons were imitating the sounds of harp playing, one could not conclude they were doing so in accordance with the music of Christian worship. Interpreting the schemes of demons is an exercise in speculation. Who is to say the demons were not seeking to disturb the monk's tranquility by assaulting him with an aberrant form of praise or seeking to pull him in a more carnal direction? It is mere assertion to insist otherwise.



It is worth pointing out an inconsistency here on the part of some proponents of instrumental worship. They claim that the objection to instrumental music in Christian worship was a late phenomenon caused by the rise of asceticism, and yet in this instance they appeal to a paragon of asceticism to argue for the use of instruments.

#### 10. Ephraem the Syrian played the kithara as his female choirs sang in the churches.

Ephraem the Syrian was a fourth-century teacher and deacon in Nisibis and Edessa. He died in A.D. 373. About 150 years later, Jacob of Sarug wrote in Syriac about Ephraem's life, an edition of which is contained in *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, III (p. 665 ff.), a work produced by Paul Bedjan and published in the late nineteenth century.

There is a question about the accuracy of the information about Ephraem that was available to Jacob over a century later. McKinnon cautions, "By the sixth century [Ephraem's] biography had become richly ornamented with legend" (*Music in Early Christian Literature*, 92). So it is a mistake to accept Jacob's comments at face value. But putting that concern aside, in *The Sacred Bridge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 1:218, Eric Werner offered the following translation of Bedjan's edition of Jacob of Sarug's text (ellipses in original):

Ephraem arose against the games and the dances of the young people, and he gathered the daughters of the covenant [virgins, pledged to chastity], and he taught them songs, both refrain-songs [?] and alternative songs [antiphons]. . . . And each time the daughters of the covenant gathered in the Churches on the Festivals and Sundays . . . ; and he, like a father, stood in their midst, accompanying them with the kithara, teaching them the various kinds of song and the change [modulation?] of songs, until the entire city gathered about him, and the crowd of his opponents disbanded. . . .

Werner makes it sound as if Jacob was saying that Ephraem accompanied his choir of virgins on the kithara while they sang, but his translation is misleading. The text is rendered as follows by Johannes Quasten in *Music and Worship in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Pastoral Musicians, 1983), 78-79:

When the holy Ephraem saw how all were being torn away by the singing (of the heretics) and since he wanted to keep his own people away from dishonorable and worldly plays and concerts, he himself founded choirs of consecrated virgins, taught them the hymns, and responses whose wonderful contents celebrated the birth of Christ, his baptism, fasting, suffering, resurrection and ascension, as well as the martyrs and the dead. He had these virgins come to the church on the feasts of the Lord and on those of the martyrs, as they did on Sundays. He himself was in their midst as their father and citharist of the Holy Spirit, and he taught them music and the laws of song.

This puts things in a different light. Ephraem is not accompanying them *with the kithara*; he is among them *as their father and kitharist of the Holy Spirit*. As the Spirit-filled director of the choir, he produces from it harmonious sounds in praise of Christ; he is the kitharist of the Holy Spirit in that metaphorical sense. This understanding is in keeping with the author's desire

to magnify Ephraem, the normal ecclesiastical use of the instrument as a metaphor, and Ephraem's well known opposition to instrumental music. On the last point, McKinnon remarks (*The Church Fathers and Musical Instruments*, Ph.D. dissertation [1965], 189-190):

One of the reasons that prompted Ephraem to provide hymns for his congregation was the need to counter the popular gnostic psalms of Bardesanes. He also adopted Bardesanes' practice of having the hymns sung by choirs of boys and of women. On one point, however, there was no question of compromise – the instrumental accompaniment. That Ephraem was acquainted with the heretic's usage in this regard is clear:

A group of boys entered before Bardesanes. These he taught to sing various types of hymns with the kithara.

What he felt about the use of this instrument, however, is revealed in another passage:

Where kithara playing and dancing and hand clapping find place, there is the beguiling of men, the corruption of women, the sorrow of angels and a feast for the devil . . . Today, to all appearances, they sing psalms, as God had ordained, and tomorrow they will eagerly dance as taught by Satan. Today they contradict Satan and tomorrow they follow him . . . Let it be far from you that today, attentively as one loving Christ you listen to the reading of divine Scripture, and tomorrow as a criminal and a hater of Christ you listen to lyre playing.

On another occasion he mentions both aulos and kithara:

Act not according to pagan customs, but according to Christian custom. Do not crown your brow nor institute dances. Do not enervate your hearing with auloi and kitharas.

Ephraem's attitude is in keeping with the opposition to instrumental music in this region at that time. John Chrysostom, a prominent representative of that opposition, said, "Where aulos-players are, there Christ is not" and referred to cymbals and auloi, along with dancing, obscene songs, and drunkenness, as "the devil's heap of garbage" (*The Temple, the Church Fathers, and Early Western Chant*, chapter IV, 69).

If in the face of this evidence one still insists that Ephraem employed a literal kithara in connection with his choir of virgins, Werner's translation suggests he did so as part of his training of the singers, teaching them the various songs. There is no reason to think it was used during the singing that took place in the assembly of the church for worship. Indeed, "[o]ne can only imagine the outburst the situation would have evoked from . . . Chrysostom" (*The Temple, the Church Fathers, and Early Western Chant*, chapter IV, 77).

## **11. Victricius of Rouen urged Christians in his congregation to play their instruments.**

Victricius was Bishop of Rouen, a city in the Roman province of Gaul (modern France). In A.D. 396/397, he composed a sermon, *De laude sanctorum*, on the occasion of his reception of a number of relics (small fragments of the bodies of several martyred saints) from Ambrose of Milan. Some claim that in section 5 of this work Victricius urged his congregation, "play your instruments and mount the paths to heaven with your dances," and take this as evidence that instrumental music was used in Christian worship assemblies of that day. That is incorrect.

The key word in the sentence in question from section 5 of *De laude sanctorum* is *psallo*, the Latin equivalent of the Greek *psallō*. As with its Greek counterpart, the meaning of the word had evolved from its classical sense to encompass singing that was unaccompanied. Max Harris states in *Sacred Folly: A New History of the Feast of Fools* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 105 (fn. 35), "*Psallere*, in classical Latin, meant to play on or sing to a stringed instrument (*TLL*, s.v., *psallo*), but in medieval Christian liturgy it meant to sing without accompaniment." This is obvious, for example, in the fact the Vulgate uses *psallo* (*psallat*) in its rendering of Jas. 5:13.

It is thus not surprising that in Thomas Head, ed., *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 38, Stanford professor Philippe Buc renders the sentence from *De laude sanctorum*: "And you as well, sacred and inviolate virgins, sing psalms [*psallite*], sing psalms [*psallite*], dance in choirs, and strike with your foot the paths through which one ascends to Heaven!" Gillian Clark translates it, "You too, holy and inviolate virgins, chant, chant, and in your choirs dance on the paths which lead to heaven" ("Victricius of Rouen: Praising the Saints," *Journal of Christian Studies* 7.3 [1999], 383). Peter Gemeinhardt writes in chapter 7 of Peter Gemeinhardt et al. eds., *Education and Religion in Late Antique Christianity* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 114 (fn. 49), "In *De laude sanctorum* 5 (76.8-10), Victricius exhorts the 'holy and inviolable virgins' to chant and 'in your choirs dance on the paths that lead to heaven' (*Vos quoque, sacrae inuiolatae que uirgines, psallite, psallite, et choreis tramites quibus ad caelum ascenditur pede pulsate*)." Instruments are not mentioned.

Indeed, it is unthinkable that Victricius would be sanctioning the religious use of musical instruments on this occasion when a bishop of the stature of Ambrose of Milan, the very bishop responsible for the transfer of the relics, had made clear the incompatibility of instrumental music and Christian worship. For example, Ambrose contrasted those engaging in prayer and the singing of hymns and psalms with those who chose carousing at the same hour by asking condemningly, "Hymns are sung, and you grasp the cithara? Psalms are sung, and you take up the psaltery and tympanum?" (*Music in Early Christian Literature*, 128-129).

## 12. Prudentius wrote a hymn that speaks of his praising God with a lyre.

Aurelius Clemens Prudentius was a Christian poet from northern Spain who died in the early fifth century. It is alleged that in Hymn 9 of his work *Cathemerinon* he spoke of his praising God with a lyre, but that is a misunderstanding.

The opening lines of that hymn read (translation from Carolinne White, *Early Christian Latin Poets* [New York: Routledge, 2000], 82):

Give me my plectrum, boy, that I may sing in faithful verse  
A sweet and melodious song, of the glorious deeds of Christ.  
Him alone may my Muse sing of, Him alone may my lyre praise.  
Christ it is whose future coming was proclaimed by the priest-king.  
In his vestments, with voice, with strings and percussion,  
Drinking deep the spirit flowing into him from heaven.  
We sing of miracles performed and already proved.  
The world is witness and the earth denies not what it has seen,  
That God was made manifest to men to teach them in person.

Prudentius is here clearly speaking in the person of David, who was understood to have prophesied about Christ through his psalms. David was the "priest-king" who proclaimed the future coming of Christ, singing about his glorious deeds. Hilary of Poitiers, writing decades before Prudentius, stated the theme clearly in the preface to his book of hymns: "Blessed the prophet David the first with the harp to announce to the world in his hymns Christ in the flesh" (Gerard O'Daly, *Days Linked by Song: Prudentius' Cathemerinon* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2012], 262). O'Daly comments (p. 262-263):

Hilary here makes David – commonly believed in antiquity to be the composer of the Psalms – a poet prophesying Christ in his *hymni*. The theme is widespread, and Prudentius subscribes to it in stanza 2 of our poem. David is the *rex sacerdos* ('priest-king') referred to here . . . David's role as prophet of Christ is stressed in the New Testament, in the reference to him as prophet in Peter's address in Acts 2:30 (see the whole passage, Acts 2:29-36), and Christ's reference to 'David in the Spirit' or 'David inspired by the Spirit' in Matt. 22:43.

John Haines states in *Medieval Song in Romance Languages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 122, "Prudentius reminds the reader of his opening heroic theme by calling David a priest-king (*rex sacerdos*). Like many writers before and after him, he associates David with the later priest-king just mentioned on the preceding strophe, Christ – David being a prophetic type of Christ." In a picture reminiscent of 2 Sam. 6:14, David praises with voice, strings, and percussion under the influence of the Spirit.

The poet then shifts the focus to his present day, a time when a future coming is not prophesied but praise for miracles performed and already proved is given. Christ has come, God made manifest to men, and all the earth bears witness. Here there is no mention of an instrument.

### **13. Synesius of Cyrene wrote a poem indicating he sang praises to Christ accompanied by a kithara.**

Synesius of Cyrene was born into a pagan family and became a staunch Neoplatonist, having studied under the famous Hypatia. The story of his conversion to Christianity is murky. After successfully requesting from the emperor a reduction in taxes for his home region, he returned to Cyrene in 402 and married a Christian woman a year or so later. He soon defended the city against an invasion, and his popularity led to his being elected bishop. He accepted the office reluctantly on the condition he be allowed to continue living with his wife, to retain his

philosophical convictions about the preexistence of souls and eternity of matter, and to retain an allegorical interpretation of the resurrection of the body. McKinnon remarks, "Never completely christianized, he stands unique among the church fathers in the degree of his attachment to the pagan past" (*Music in Early Christian Literature*, 56). Nevertheless, he was installed as bishop by Theophilus of Alexandria around A.D. 410, presumably on the condition he keep his aberrant views to himself.

Synesius wrote a series of hymns, all of which are thought to have been composed prior to his becoming a bishop (see Jay Bregman, *Synesius of Cyrene, Philosopher-bishop* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982], 78-79). The opening of Hymn VII is cited as proof that musical instruments were used in Christian worship assemblies. It reads (*Music in Early Christian Literature*, 56):

I was the first to invent this meter  
For thee, blessed, immortal,  
Illustrious offspring of the virgin,  
Jesus of Solyma,  
And with newly-devised harmonies  
To strike the cithara's strings.

The fact Synesius was a musician does not bar him from using the kithara in its common metaphorical sense of vocal praise for the Lord. Centuries earlier, Clement of Alexandria used the kithara as a metaphor from the mouth struck by the Spirit (*Paedagogos*, Book II, chapter 4), so such usage had a long history in the region. McKinnon says, "There is a good possibility that Synesius uses the kithara figuratively" (dissertation, 175) and that the reference to the kithara "could be purely figurative" (*Music in Early Christian Literature*, 56). Indeed, at the end of the next hymn (VIII), Synesius refers to his soul being freed from the fetters of earthly life and his being able to sing hymns again in that state. In reference to that singing, he writes, "I shall attune this unstained lyre [kithara] to Thee." So clearly Synesius was capable of referring to the kithara in a nonliteral sense.

But even if the references to the kithara in the openings of Hymn VII and Hymn VIII ("I will lift up a clear song on my ivory-laid lyre") were intended literally, there is no indication the hymns were sung in Christian worship assemblies. On the contrary, the content of Hymn VIII, with its petitions for his brother, sister, friend, and wife, seems too personal for a congregational hymn, and we know from his Epistle 94 (English translation as 95) that he sang about Justice with the kithara in a nonliturgical setting. McKinnon says of Synesius's hymns, "it should be remembered that this is not a question of liturgical hymns but esoteric hymns suited only for the private devotion of a philosopher" (dissertation, 175-176) and that they were sung "presumably in a domestic rather than a liturgical setting" (*Music in Early Christian Literature*, 56).

This metaphorical or nonliturgical understanding of the kithara in Synesius's hymns is supported by the fact a fourth-century Alexandrian law made clear there was no room for kithara-playing in churches. According to *Canons of Basil* 74, a reader who simply learned to play the kithara was required to confess that conduct and to cease from playing the instrument. If he persisted, he was to be excommunicated (*Music in Early Christian Literature*, 120). So if the

kithara in Synesius's hymns was literal and if after his conversion he continued playing it during the singing of those hymns, it seems certain he was not doing so in Christian assemblies.

Note that if one assumes the hymns in question refer to a literal kithara, it is not clear that after his conversion Synesius continued praising Christ in nonliturgical settings with a literal kithara. It is possible (McKinnon thinks "probable"), despite their Christian content, that Synesius composed those hymns prior to his conversion, the date of which is uncertain. McKinnon states (dissertation, 176), "The dedication of Hymn Seven to Jesus would not be surprising in the work of a syncretist philosopher who had a special regard for the Christian deity and whose hymns 'show a strange mixture of neo-Platonist and Christian ideas.' Such religious toleration was common among the pagan aristocracy of the fourth and fifth centuries." In that case, Synesius could have composed the hymns for accompaniment with the kithara and then ceased singing them in that manner after his baptism.

So Synesius does not establish the use of musical instruments for worship in Christian assemblies or even in nonliturgical settings. McKinnon rightly concludes, "After considering the very special circumstances involved, the case of Synesius' kithara, that is, if it was a real kithara, certainly cannot be taken as a genuine exception to the universal patristic opposition to instruments" (dissertation, 177).

#### 14. Diodore of Tarsus mandated the use of musical instruments.

Diodore served as bishop of Tarsus from A.D. 378 until his death around 390. In his commentary *In psalmum*, he says the following of Ps. 32:1-2 (*Music in Early Christian Literature*, 77):

'Rejoice ye just, in the Lord; praise befits the upright' (Ps 32.1). He calls the Israelites 'just' in comparison with the Assyrians and similarly he calls them 'upright'. Thus he encouraged them to hymn God after the marvelous event which happened to them.

'Praise the Lord upon the cithara, sing to him on the psaltery of ten strings' (Ps 32.2). Having said above that it is necessary for them to hymn God, he adds that they must do this with instruments.

Clearly the statement that they must "do this" (i.e., hymn God) with instruments is a comment on the text of Ps. 32:2 wherein *the Israelites* were told to praise God with instruments. This says nothing about what this text was understood to mean for worship in the new covenant. Instrumental worship in the Old Testament was routinely understood as a shadow or type of the higher, purely vocal worship of the new covenant. For example, Eusebius, who wrote the first history of the church around A.D. 325, wrote the following in his commentary on the Psalms (translation from Ferguson, *A Cappella Music*, 61; see also the quotes of Theodoret below):

Of old at the time those of the circumcision were worshipping with symbols and types it was not inappropriate to send up hymns to God with the psalterion and kithara, . . . We render our hymn a living psalterion and a living kithara, with spiritual song. The unison of voices of Christians would be more acceptable to God than any musical instrument. Accordingly in all the churches of God, united in soul and attitude, with one mind and in

agreement of faith and piety, we send up a unison melody in the words of the Psalms. We are accustomed to employ such psalmodies and spiritual kitharas because the apostle teaches this saying, "in psalms and odes and spiritual hymns."

John Chrysostom wrote in his *Homily on Psalm 146:2-3 (A Cappella Music, 68)*:

David at that time was singing [*epsalle*] in the Psalms, and we today with David. He had a kithara of lifeless strings; the church has a kithara arranged of living strings. Our tongues are the strings of our kithara, putting for a different sound yet a godly harmony. For indeed women and men, old and young, have different voices but they do not differ in the word of hymnody for the Spirit blends the voice of each and effects one melody in all . . .

The soul is an excellent musician, an artist; the body is an instrument, holding the place of the kithara and aulos and lyre . . . Since it is necessary to pray unceasingly, the instrument is always with the artist unceasingly.

### **15. Jerome speaks positively of a Christian woman who praises God with the tympanum and teaches other women to be harpists for Christs and kitharists for the Savior.**

Jerome is a towering figure in church history, a great scholar of the late fourth and early fifth century (died in 419/420). He spent the last 35 years of his life in the Holy Land.

In Epistle LIV, *Ad Furiam de uiduitate seruanda* 13, Jerome gives advice to Furia on how to preserve her widowhood. In that regard, he tells her to imitate her kinswoman, a nun in Bethlehem (translation from *Music in Early Christian Literature*, 141):

Oh if you could see your sister and if it were possible to hear in person the eloquence of her holy lips, you would perceive the mighty spirit within her tiny body and hear the entire content of the Old and New Testaments bubbling up from her heart! Fasting is her sport and prayer her recreation. She takes up the tympanum in imitation of Miriam and after Pharaoh is crowned sings before the choir of virgins: 'Let us sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and the rider he has thrown into the sea' (Ex. 15.1). These she instructs as harpists for Christ, these she teaches to be citharists for the Savior. Thus she passes the day and the night, awaiting the coming of the bridegroom with oil ready for the lamps. You, too, then – imitate your kinswoman . . .

As McKinnon notes, the music Jerome ascribes to the kinswoman is "a spiritual kind of music." She is analogized to Miriam in Ex. 15:21 in that she, like Miriam, sings before a group of women, the choir of virgins. She teaches those virgins to be metaphorical harpists for Christ and kitharists for the Savior by teaching them to praise him in song with harmony and pure hearts.

In *Homily 65 On Psalm 87* [88], "Jerome compared many singing together in unison to the 'cithara which with many separate chords produces one sound'" (*A Cappella Music*, 48 [fn. 40]). He often employed the idea of the person as the instrument. For example, he wrote in *Homily on Psalm 91* [92] (*A Cappella Music*, 62):

'With ten-stringed instrument and lyre, with melody upon the harp,' I shall paraphrase this in simple language: Whenever we lift up pure hands in prayer, without deliberate distractions and contention, we are playing to the Lord with a ten-stringed instrument . . . Our body and soul and spirit – our harp – are all in harmony, all their strings in tune.

He wrote in *Homily 48, On Psalm 136 [137] (A Cappella Music, 62)*:

Just as the shepherd's pipe is composed of many reeds but sends forth one harmonious tune, even so, we have our own musical instrument on which to play, and by means of it, through works, we offer a tune, a song, a hymn to God. By analogy, too, through our sense of hearing, through smell, taste, sight, and through all our faculties, we offer a hymn and a song to the Lord as from a single instrument.

It is perverse to suggest that in his letter to Furia Jerome was endorsing literal musical instruments in the praise of Christ. Earlier in the very letter he tells Furia, "Let the male-singer (*cantor*) be repelled as a bane, banish from your house female citharists (*fidicinas*) and harpists (*psaltrias*) and that devil's choir whose songs lead to death like those of the sirens." In Epistle CVII, *Ad Laetam de institutione filiae* 8, a letter to Laeta concerning her daughter Paula, a child consecrated to a life of virginity, he says, "Let her be deaf to musical instruments (*organa*); let her not know why the tibia, lyre and cithara are made" (*Music in Early Christian Literature*, 142). As noted previously, McKinnon rightly observed in *The Temple, the Church Fathers, and Early Western Chant*, chapter IV, 77:

If it had ever occurred to Christian communities of the third and fourth centuries to add instruments to their singing, indignation over this would have resounded throughout patristic literature and ecclesiastical legislation. One can only imagine the outburst the situation would have evoked from, say, *Jerome* or Chrysostom.

## 16. Augustine encouraged the singing of Psalms to the lyre or psaltery.

Augustine was bishop of Hippo in North Africa in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. He is the most renowned of the church fathers and had tremendous influence on the history of Christian thought. It is sometimes claimed, based on an article by Herbert Westerby published in James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics: Volume IX Munda-Phrygians* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917), that Augustine encouraged "the singing of Psalms to the lyre and psaltery." But that is incorrect.

The encyclopedia cites as its authority for the statement J. A. Latrobe, *The Music of the Church*, London, 1831, p. 42. The author's name is La Trobe and the correct page number is 43, where La Trobe states, "St. Augustine, reprobating dancing as a Sabbath employment, contrasts it with 'singing of Psalms to the lyre or psaltery as virgins and matrons were wont to do.'" The authority he cites for the statement is Burney's *Hist. Vol. II*, p. 27. This is a reference to Charles Burney, *A General History of Music From the Earliest Ages to the Present Period, Volume the Second* (London: J. Robson, 1782), 27.



Burney states, "The following passage from St. Augustine's eighth sermon, not only proves that the early Christians made *dancing* a part of their Sunday's amusement, but puts it out of all doubt that the primitive and pious believers accompanied their sacred songs with instruments. 'It is better to dig or to plough on the Lord's Day, than to *dance*. Instead of singing psalms to the Lyre or Psaltry, as virgins and matrons were wont to do, they now waste their time *dancing*, and even employ masters in that art.'" The problem is that Augustine never said it. All references I can find to the statement cite no source or go back to Burney's 1782 book, and I cannot find it in Augustine's writings or in standard treatments of music in church history. It appears to be a case of a mistake being perpetuated by careless repetition.

Augustine's view of the inappropriateness of instrumental music in Christian worship is evident in his Second Discourse on Psalm 32 (*Music in Early Christian Literature*, 156), as is his spiritualizing of the literal instruments of the Old Testament:

Did not the establishment of these vigils in the name of Christ bring it about that citharas be banished from this place? But here they are ordered to sound: 'Praise the Lord', he says, 'on the cithara, sing to him on the psaltery of ten strings' (Ps. 32.2). Let none turn his heart to theatrical instruments. What one is commanded here, he has within himself, as it says in another place: 'in me, O God, are vows of praise which I will pay thee' (Ps 55.12).

McKinnon remarks, "If the passage lacks the vivid explicitness of many previously quoted, it preserved, nonetheless, the radical opposition between Christian life and pagan instrumental usages" (dissertation, 199).

Elsewhere (*De doctrina christiana* II, xviii, 28) Augustine argues that the intellectual discipline of music need not be shunned because it may provide insight into Scripture, but he makes clear that in considering how an instrument might aid in comprehending spiritual things one is to avoid playing them, as that would be involvement in the heathen's "theatrical frivolities." He writes (*Music in Early Christian Literature*, 165):

But whether the fact of the matter is as Varro has related, or is not so, we must nevertheless not shun music because of the superstition of the heathen, if we are able to snatch from it anything useful for the understanding of the Holy Scriptures. Nor should we be involved with their theatrical frivolities, if we consider some point concerning citharas and other instruments which might be of aid in comprehending spiritual things.

Augustine interpreted the instruments of the Old Testament Psalms allegorically or metaphorically. He nowhere indicated that instrumental music had a place in Christian worship. If he had allowed instruments in his churches, there is no way his action would have gone unnoticed in the historical record given the well documented universally negative assessment of instruments among the church leaders of his day. This is a prime example of McKinnon's assessment: "A misunderstanding of the Church Fathers' allegorical exegesis of the instruments of the Psalms accounts for most misinterpretations" (*The Temple, the Church Fathers, and Early Western Chant*, chapter IV, 70).

For Augustine, the old-covenant praise of the Lord with instrumental music was a metaphor for praising him in the new covenant by doing his will. Thus he writes in *Expositions on Psalm 33:2 (A Cappella Music, 63)*:

"Praise the Lord with harp:" praise the Lord, presenting unto Him your bodies a living sacrifice. "Sing unto Him with the psaltery of ten-strings" (ver. 2): let your members be servants to the love of God, and your neighbor, in which are kept both the three and the seven commandments.

His *Expositions on the Psalms XLIII, 5* shows that for him playing the kithara and psalterion symbolize certain types of activities (*A Cappella Music, 63-64*):

What is the meaning of "praising on the harp," and praising on the psaltery? For he does not always do so with the harp, nor always with the psaltery. These two instruments of the musicians have each a distinct meaning of their own, worthy of our consideration, and notice. They are both borne in the hands, and played by the touch; and they stand for certain bodily works of ours. Both are good, if one knows how to play the psaltery [*psallere*], or to play the harp [*citharizare*]. But since the psaltery is that instrument which has the shell (i.e., that drum, that hollow piece of wood, by straining on which the chords resound) on the upper part of it, whereas the harp has that same concave sounding board on the lower part, there is to be a distinction made between our works, when they are "upon the harp," when "on the psaltery": both however are acceptable to God, and grateful to His ear. When we do anything according to God's commandments, obeying His commands and hearkening to Him, that we may fulfill His injunctions, when we are active and not passive, it is the psaltery that is playing. For so also do the Angels; for they have nothing to suffer. But when we suffer anything of tribulation, of trials, of offences on this earth (as we suffer from the inferior part of ourselves; i.e., from the fact that we are mortal, that we owe somewhat of tribulation to our original cause, and also from the fact of our suffering much from those who are not "above"); this is "the harp." For there rises a sweet strain from that part of us which is "below": we "suffer," and we strike the psaltery [*psallimus*] or shall I rather say we sing and we strike the harp.

In *Expositions on Psalms LVII, 14 (A Cappella Music, 64)*, "Augustine compares the psaltery and harp to two kinds of deeds wrought by the Lord – miracles from above, and sufferings from below: "The flesh working things divine, is the psaltery: the flesh suffering things human is the harp." He writes on Psalms LXXI, 28: "There seemeth to be signified by the psaltery the Spirit, by the harp the flesh."

### **17. Theodoret of Cyrus reports that in a festival in Antioch celebrating the reconciliation of an alienated faction a procession of clergy and laity was accompanied by musicians as it marched to the church.**

Theodoret was bishop of Cyrus in the middle of the fifth century. He wrote a *Church History* (from 323 to 428) that included a chapter (Book V, chapter XXXV) about Alexander, who served as bishop of Antioch from 413 to 421. In that chapter, he reports that by Alexander's

advice and exhortation the alienated followers of Eustathius, the bishop of Antioch who had been deposed in 326 in connection with the Arian controversy, were united to the rest of the body.

A festival was held in celebration of this event, as part of which Theodoret says Alexander gathered the clergy and laity and marched with them to the church, adding *kai parabolōn psallontas*. *Psallontas* is a participial form (present active masculine plural accusative) of *psallō*. As previously noted, *psallō* had evolved from its classic meaning so that by the first century it had no inherent instrumental connotations (see, e.g., *A Cappella Music*, 1-27 and BDAG, 1096). Ferguson states after surveying the lexical data, "By the end of the fourth century, the ecclesiastical sense [i.e., vocal expressions] is so uniform as to need no further documentation." Thus, it is anachronistic to render *psallontas* in the passage from Theodoret as "musicians"; it means simply "singers."

This is confirmed by the fact Theodoret had a very negative view of instrumental music and certainly would not have tolerated its use in churches. It is inconceivable, therefore, that he would speak of their use in the procession he reports and make no comment about it. Theodoret's view of instrumental music is apparent from the following sampling (from *A Cappella Music*, 53-56).

He states in *On the Healing of Greek Afflictions*:

So it was not in any need of victims or craving odors that God commanded them to sacrifice, but that he might heal the sufferings of those who were sick. So he also allowed the use of instrumental music, not that he was delighted by the harmony, but that he might little by little end the deception of idols. For if he had offered them perfect laws immediately after their deliverance from Egypt, they would have been rebellious and thrust away from the bridle, and would have hastened back to their former ruin.

He says in *On Psalms 150:4*:

"Praise him with psaltery and harp. . . ." These instruments the Levites formerly used when praising God in the temple. It was not because God enjoyed their sound, but because he accepted the purpose of their worship. For to show that God does not find pleasure in songs nor in the notes of instruments we hear him saying to the Jews: "Take though away from me the noise of thy songs, for I will not hear the melody of thy instruments." He allowed these things to be done for the reason that he wished to free them from the deception of idols. For since some of them were fond of play and laughter, and all these things were done in the temples of idols, he allowed these things in order to entice them. He used the lesser evil in order to forbid the greater, and used what was imperfect to teach what was perfect.

And he says in *Questions and Answers for the Orthodox*:

107. Question: If songs were invented by unbelievers to seduce men, but were allowed to those under the law on account of their childish state, why do those who have

received the perfect teaching of grace in their churches still uses songs, just like children under the law?

Answer: It is not simple singing that belongs to the childish state, but singing with lifeless instruments, with dancing, and with clappers. Hence the use of such instruments and the others that belong to the childish state is excluded from the singing in the churches, and simple singing is left. For it awakens the soul to a fervent desire for that which is described in the songs, it quiets the passions that arise from the flesh, it removes the evil thoughts that are implanted in us by invisible foes, it waters the soul to make it fruitful in the good things of God, it makes the soldiers of piety strong to endure hardships, it becomes for the pious a medicine to cure all the pains of life. Paul calls this the "sword of the spirit," with which he arms the soldiers of piety against their unseen foes, for it is the word of God, and when it is pondered and sung and proclaimed it has the power to drive out demons.

## 18. Organs were used commonly in Spanish churches of the fifth century.

This claim is based on the following assertion in James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics: Volume IX Munda-Phrygians* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917), 32: "Organs seem to have been in common use in the Spanish churches of A.D. 450, according to Julianus, a Spanish bishop (Hopkins and Rimbault, *The Organ*, London, 1877)." The source cited for the assertion is Edward J. Hopkins and Edward F. Rimbault, *The Organ, Its History and Construction: A Comprehensive Treatise*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Robert Cocks & Co., 1877). The prior edition (1870), to which I have access, states (p. 17): "The *organ* was early used in the public service of the church. Platina tells us that it was first employed for religious worship by Pope Vitalian I., A.D. 666; but according to Julianus (a Spanish bishop, who flourished A.D. 450), it was in common use in the churches of Spain at least 200 years before Vitalian's time." The reference given by Hopkins and Rimbault in support of their statement is "*Lorinus*, Psal. 33." This refers to the comment on Psalm 33 in the early seventeenth-century commentary on the Psalms in Latin by Johannes Lorinus, *Commentatorium in librum psalmodum*. On p. 569 of that work, Lorinus, referring to the work of Durantus, ascribes to Julianus, whom he identifies as one of the authors of the catena on Job and one who predates Vitalian and Gregory the Great, the statement that organs might be used with piety and were in use in churches when he wrote.

Notice first that Lorinus does not suggest Julianus was a Spanish bishop from the fifth century. Rather, since Lorinus refers to the work of Durantus, he no doubt was referring to the Julianus of whom Durantus wrote, Julianus of Halicarnassus, a Greek writer of the sixth century who was believed to have written the commentary on Job that was later used in forming the catena on Job. Durantus (known by several variations of that spelling) wrote *The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* that was published in the latter part of the thirteenth century. The notion that Lorinus's Julianus was a fifth-century Spanish bishop seems to have originated in the unreferenced assertion by Joseph Brookbank in *The Well-tuned Organ, Or, An Exercitation* (London: 1660), 48 and been repeated uncritically by Hopkins and Rimbault and those that relied on them.

In the early eighteenth century, Joseph Bingham rebutted Durantus's appeal to Julianus's catena on Job, the same work to which Lorinus later appealed, as support for the use of musical

instruments by showing from Julianus's Greek text that Durantus had mistaken Julianus to be speaking of his own time. That error was repeated by Lorinus through his reliance on Durantus. Bingham explained in *Antiquities of the Christian Church, Volume 1* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006; previously published by Reeves and Turner, 1878), 315:

I should here have put an end to this chapter, but that some readers would be apt to reckon it an omission, that I have taken no notice of organs and bells among the utensils of the church. But the true reason is, that there were no such things in use in the ancient churches for many ages. Music in churches is as ancient as the Apostles, but instrumental music not so. For it is now generally agreed by learned men, that the use of organs came into the Church since the time of Thomas Aquinas, anno 1250 . . .

The use of the instrument indeed is much more ancient, but not in church-service; the not attending to which distinction is the thing that imposes upon many writers. In the East the instrument was always in use in the Emperor's courts, perhaps from the time of Julian, who has an epigram giving a handsome description of it. But in the western parts, the instrument was not so much as known till the eighth century: for the first organ that was ever seen in France was one sent as a present to King Pipin by Constantinus Copronymus, the Greek emperor, anno 766 . . . But now it was only used in princes' courts, and not yet brought into churches. Nor was it ever received into the Greek churches, there being no mention of an organ in all their Liturgies, ancient or modern, if Mr. Gregory's judgment is to be taken. But Durantus however contends for their antiquity both in the Greek and Latin churches, and offers to prove it, but with ill success. First, from Julianus Halicarnassensis, a Greek writer, anno 510, whom he makes to say, that organs were used in the church of his time. But he mistakes the sense of his author, who speaks not of his own times, but of the times of Job and the Jewish temple. For commenting upon those words of Job, 30, 31, "My harp is turned to mourning, and my organ into the voice of them that weep," he says [footnote cites Catena in Job.30.[31.] (p. 465.)] 'there was no prohibition to use musical instruments, or organs, if it was done with piety, because they were used in the temple.' By which it is plain he speaks of the Jewish temple in the singular, and not of Christian temples or churches in the plural, as Durantus mistakes him.

This is why specialists in the music of the early church have ignored claims that musical instruments were used in Spanish churches in the fifth century. There simply is no credible basis for it. The claim arose from a thirteenth-century misinterpretation of Julianus's comments on Job, comments that were later imputed to an unknown fifth-century bishop, and was perpetuated by a few careless scholars. The fact it continues to appear in popular writings is a tribute to the stubbornness of false ideas that are useful.

It is now thought that Julianus/Julian of Halicarnassus did not write the commentary on Job that found its way into the catena on Job but that it was written by a fourth-century Syrian theologian dubbed "Julian the Arian." This confirms that he was not claiming musical instruments were used in the churches of his day because the Syrian theologians John Chrysostom and Theodoret of Cyrus make clear that was not the case.

## **19. Hymns composed by Yared in Ethiopia in the sixth century indicate Christians sang to the accompaniment of musical instruments.**

The *Degwa* (various spellings) is a collection of hymns or chants that is highly regarded in the tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahido* Church. It has a variety of notational symbols, including what is known as a *medgam*, a number placed in the margin, "which signals the singer to repeat that portion of text with instrumental accompaniment and dance" (Kay Kaufman Shelemay, Peter Jeffery, and Ingrid Monson, "Oral and written transmission in Ethiopian Christian chant" in Iain Fenlon, ed., *Early Music History 12* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 63).

The *Degwa* is traditionally attributed to Yared, who was a priest and later a monk in Ethiopia in the sixth century, but the nature of his connection to the collection is unclear. What is clear, however, is that the musical notations in the manuscripts of the *Degwa* originated, or at the very least were reconstructed and revised, in the sixteenth century (*Early Music History*, 55-98). They are absent from all earlier manuscripts. Therefore, the notations are not reliable indicators of how the hymns were performed in the church of Yared's day, a thousand years earlier, regardless of his connection to the *Degwa*.

It is difficult to imagine the church in Ethiopia would be using musical instruments in worship in the sixth century given its association with the church in Alexandria. Diarmaid Mac Culloch observes in *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 243, "It was not surprising that during the controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries, this Church [the Ethiopian church], which derived its fragile link to the wider episcopal succession via Alexandria, followed the Egyptian Church into the Miaphysite camp." As noted previously, the church in Alexandria was staunchly opposed to the use of musical instruments.

## **20. Adomnan of Iona owned a bell.**

Adomnan was Abbot of Iona (western coast of Scotland) in the seventh and early eighth century. A bell which is traditionally associated with him is kept in a parish church in Innerwick. (The bell in the museum in Kilmartin is a replica.) Its age and association with Adomnan are uncertain, but assuming it belonged to Adomnan, there is no evidence that he used it in worship or in the assembly of the church.

## **21. Bede the Venerable indicated the use of musical instruments in Christian worship.**

Bede the Venerable was an English scholar in the early part of the eighth century. According to John Mason Neal and Richard Frederik Littedale, *A Commentary on the Psalms: From Primitive and Mediaeval Writers and From the Various Office-Books and Hymns of the Roman, Mozarabic, and Syrian Rites*, volume 3, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London, 1874), 23, Bede commented on the title of Psalm 83 (not 97) by defining a "song of a psalm" in the Old Testament. He stated, "*A Song of a Psalm* is when, after a prelude on an instrument the sound of a singing voice is heard, following and keeping time with the instrument, imitating the strains of the psaltery with the

tones of the voice." He then provides his understanding of the symbolic or spiritual meaning of the phrase:

And because a *Song* mystically signifies contemplation of Divine wisdom; but a *Psalm*, which is produced by the hands, means the fulfilling of action, that is rightly called *A Song of a Psalm* wherein knowledge and instruction are united with effectiveness in good works, according to that saying, "If thou desire wisdom, keep the commandments, and the Lord shall give her unto thee;" a wonderful token whereof was manifest in Cornelius the centurion. As to what a *Psalm of a Song* is and means, has been already said in the twenty-ninth (xxx.) Psalm.

Bede is not here reporting or advocating the use of instrumental music in Christian worship assemblies.

### Conclusion

In attempting to prove the early church worshiped with musical instruments, some proponents of that view engage in the proverbial exercise of throwing everything against the wall in the hope something sticks. I have explained in this paper why nothing does stick, which is why specialists in the field, historians of music and of the early church, routinely reject the conclusion advocates of instrumental music push. Multiplying bad evidence still leaves one with bad evidence.

Debate over the propriety of using instruments in Christian worship should not be sidetracked by denial of reasonably secure historical facts. If new evidence is discovered, the matter will need to be revisited, but until then, the discussion should focus on the best explanation for the universal absence of instrumental music in Christian worship for many centuries. I am persuaded that absence is best explained by theological opposition based on the change in the form of worship effected by the change of covenants.