

REVIEW OF *THE OTHER SIDE OF THE KEYBOARD*

By Ashby L. Camp

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Milton Jones argues in his booklet *The Other Side of the Keyboard* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2005) that those who believe, as he once did, that it is wrong to use musical instruments in Christian worship are in error. According to him, the "more biblical" view is that the use of musical instruments is a matter of indifference to God. Jones says there are "compelling reasons" for that conclusion that have left him "very convicted" as to the correctness of his current understanding. He promises in the Introduction to present those reasons in the booklet. He notes that the booklet is written at a popular rather than a scholarly level, so I will try to review it in kind.

To echo brother Jones's sentiment, I have no desire to wrangle over this issue. I have studied the matter and am convinced that the better understanding is that musical instruments should not be used in Christian worship. (For more details, see my online paper "Music in Christian Worship.") I love those who disagree with me, but I believe their attempts to persuade members of Churches of Christ to abandon their objection to using musical instruments in worship should be resisted.

I find it puzzling that the attempt to persuade members of Churches of Christ that their view of musical instruments is wrong is couched as an appeal for unity. It is true there would be unity regarding the use of instruments if those in Churches of Christ came to believe as those in Christian Churches, but that goes both ways. There also would be unity on this issue if those in Christian Churches came to believe as those in Churches of Christ. Since the importance of unity says nothing about which group should change its view to achieve unity, it does not support the claim that Churches of Christ should change their view.

Of course, unity on the instrumental music issue also could be achieved if those for whom it is a matter of indifference voluntarily abstained from using instruments in worship in deference to those they perceive to be their weaker brothers. That path to unity does not go both ways because those who believe the practice is wrong would violate their consciences by engaging in it or teaching that it is acceptable.

If unity is the paramount concern, why does this particular option for unity not get more attention from those in the Christian Church and those lobbying for acceptance of musical instruments in Churches of Christ? Apparently they believe that giving God "unshackled praise" (meaning praise accompanied by musical instruments) is worth the price of division. The mystery is how they can take that stand and then criticize Churches of Christ for believing that giving God "certainly desired praise" (meaning praise unaccompanied by musical instruments) is worth the price of division.

Chapter One is a biographical sketch of how Jones came to change his mind about the use of musical instruments in worship. He claims that when he studied the

issue objectively rather than through the bias of his *a cappella* heritage, he saw that the arguments for *a cappella* worship were too weak to persuade. Eventually, this realization led him to live on "both sides of the keyboard," meaning to worship both with musical instruments and without.

Chapter Two is not a model of clarity, but filling in a few gaps, Jones makes the following numbered points given in bold type. My comments are interspersed in normal type.

(1) The disagreement over the propriety of using musical instruments in Christian worship is a disagreement over how to interpret the Bible.

This is true but not helpful. The fact a disagreement is a disagreement over how to interpret the Bible does not mean it is insignificant or that one can have no convictions about the matter. Indeed, Jones makes clear that he is "very convicted" about the correctness of his understanding that musical instruments are a matter of indifference to God. If he can be sure of his interpretation, sure enough to publish a booklet explaining why those who disagree with him are wrong, he cannot suggest to others that they hold their convictions more loosely on the grounds that their views are mere interpretations.

(2) Churches of Christ exclude the use of musical instruments in worship on the basis of three principles of interpretation: the pattern principle (or pattern authority), the law of silence, and the law of exclusion.

This is an inadequate presentation of the basis on which musical instruments are excluded from Christian worship. It ignores the claim based on Scripture and church history that instrumental music was an integral part of the sacrificial worship of the Jewish temple that was superseded by the higher worship inaugurated by Christ. That is the theological context in which the New Testament's silence regarding instruments in Christian worship must be gauged. This is a surprising omission given Jones's study of the issue and his participation in debates over the question.

Moreover, Jones apparently does not recognize that what he lists as three separate interpretive principles are different aspects of a single interpretive conclusion. The Church of Christ, along with many Protestants, historically has conditioned worship practices on divine "authorization," on an indication in Scripture that God desires or accepts the practice. What God desires or accepts in worship may be learned from a direct command to engage in the practice, an inference that the practice is acceptable, or an example indicating the practice is acceptable. If Scripture provides no such indication (i.e., is "silent" on the matter), the practice is "excluded" in the sense the one devoted to pleasing God should abstain from it or, at the very least, in the sense that the church cannot bind the practice on congregants by making it a part of corporate worship.

The conclusion that one should worship God only in ways he has indicated he desires or accepts is drawn from Scripture. I say more about this below.

(3) The pattern principle is the claim that it is improper to bind on Christians practices for which there is no command, example, or necessary inference.

Jones explains the "pattern principle" this way: "The belief was that to bind any biblical teaching, you needed 'a command, example, or necessary inference.'" Since the issue under discussion is the use of musical instruments in worship and since to bind something on someone is to make it obligatory for them, I assume Jones is saying that under the pattern principle it is improper to bind on someone the practice of using musical instruments in worship unless that practice is supported in Scripture by a command, an example, or a necessary inference.

(4) Churches of Christ reason from the pattern principle as follows:

(a) It is improper to bind on Christians practices for which there is no command, example, or necessary inference.

(b) Using musical instruments in corporate worship constitutes binding that practice on Christians in the congregation.

(c) There is no command, example, or necessary inference for using musical instruments in Christian worship.

(d) Therefore, using musical instruments in corporate worship is improper.

Jones does not spell out how the belief that it is improper to bind any biblical teaching for which there is no command, example, or necessary inference leads to the exclusion of musical instruments in worship. I assume he has in mind the argument given above.

(5) The argument based on the pattern principle does not establish the impropriety of using musical instruments in Christian worship because the pattern principle did not come from the Bible. Rather, it was adopted as a way of interpreting the Bible because it was similar to how the U. S. Constitution was being interpreted in the formative days of the Restoration Movement.

Jones simply states that the pattern principle did not come from the Bible, but unless he is claiming that fact somehow undermines the argument against using musical instruments that is based on the pattern principle it has no relevance to the case he is presenting. To undermine a deductive argument, one must establish that one or more of the premises are untrue or that the argument is invalid. So it appears Jones is saying that the pattern principle is false because it did not come from the Bible and therefore cannot support the argument against using musical instruments that is based on it. (If he merely is saying that the pattern principle *may be* false because it did not come from Scripture, it is insufficient to cast doubt on the truth of the premise and thus insufficient to invalidate the conclusion.)

In claiming the pattern principle is false, Jones puts himself in the odd position of claiming it is *proper* to bind on Christians practices for which there is no command, example, or necessary inference. If that is what he means, the implications are profound. It would be proper for a church to bind on its members any practice it chose, which is a wholesale rejection of the fundamental Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura*! If that is not what he means, his point is indecipherable (at least to me).

The suggestion that the pattern principle – the claim that it is improper to bind on Christians practices for which there is no command, example, or necessary inference – was adopted by Restorationists from a similar method of interpreting the U. S. Constitution is dubious to say the least. That principle predates the Constitution, and I have trouble seeing how it would be relevant to constitutional interpretation. Elaboration on these points would have been beneficial.

(6) Churches of Christ apply the pattern principle inconsistently. They fail to practice some things the pattern principle requires (e.g., head coverings for women, speaking in tongues, the holy kiss, and raising hands in prayer) and practice other things the pattern principle excludes (e.g., church buildings, song books, and special church programs).

Presumably Jones is here attempting a form of *reductio ad absurdum*. The claim is that the pattern principle must be unsound, and thus the argument based on it invalid, because it leads to conclusions that are absurd. Specifically, he claims that the pattern principle requires and forbids certain practices that Churches of Christ, by refusing to require and forbid, tacitly acknowledge are absurd to require and forbid.

There is much confusion here. The pattern principle, as Jones has defined it, is the claim that it is improper to bind on Christians practices for which there is no command, example, or necessary inference. It is a protection of the worshiper's conscience by not allowing manmade practices and doctrines (those for which there is no divine sanction) to be bound on him. In claiming that the pattern principle requires certain practices, Jones turns his own definition of the principle on its head. It no longer is a shield against the imposition of human authority; it is the basis of affirmative obligations. Similarly, in claiming that the pattern principle forbids certain practices, the principle no longer precludes requiring (binding) certain practices; it is the basis for affirmative prohibitions.

If Jones has in mind a definition of "pattern principle" other than what he provided, he owes it to the reader to state that definition. Otherwise, it is impossible to assess the validity of his criticism.

My guess is that Jones is here using a definition of pattern principle that is something like: the church is required to practice all express commands and clearly inferred obligations and to imitate all conduct of Christians recorded in Scripture and is required to abstain from all conduct for which there is no express command or clearly inferred obligation and in which there is no record of Christians engaging. That is the

only way I can make sense of his claim that the pattern principle requires head coverings, speaking in tongues, holy kissing, and raising hands in prayer and precludes using things like church buildings and song books. However, that is not how most knowledgeable members of the Church of Christ would define the principle by which musical instruments are excluded.

As noted in the discussion of point (2), Scripture and church history suggest that instrumental music was an integral part of the sacrificial worship of the Jewish temple that was superseded by the higher worship inaugurated by Christ. Whatever one believes about the effect of silence in some other theological context, certainly in this context it means that instruments should not be used in worship; something positive is needed to overturn the scriptural and historical presumption against their use.

A separate question is whether the fact there is no indication in the New Testament that God desires or accepts musical instruments in worship – that it is silent in that regard – is *by itself* sufficient to prohibit their use. In other words, *apart from* the indications that instrumental music was a superseded aspect of Jewish temple worship, is the lack of New Testament authorization for the use of musical instruments sufficient to exclude their use?

This is where most of the battles over this issue have been fought. Instead of teaching the broader theological context, people in Churches of Christ often have been content to appeal solely to the silence of the New Testament regarding instrumental usage as the basis of its prohibition. I think that appeal is valid, but by limiting ourselves in that way we have understated the strength of the *a cappella* position. But even this narrower approach is different from the definition of the pattern principle Jones must be using to claim that the principle requires head coverings, speaking in tongues, holy kissing, and raising hands in prayer and precludes using things like church buildings and song books.

As I have said, the Church of Christ historically, along with many Protestants, has conditioned worship practices on divine "authorization," on an indication in Scripture that God desires or accepts the practice. Given that God has specified ways of Christian worship that one can be certain are pleasing to him, if one cannot discern from affirmative commands, inferences, or examples that God desires or accepts an additional form of worship, it is presumptuous to engage in it.

This approach is rooted in Scripture. We see in the Old Testament that God is particular about the manner or form in which he is worshiped and that mankind is not free to worship him however it chooses. For example, Deut. 12:29-32 (NIV) states:

²⁹ The LORD your God will cut off before you the nations you are about to invade and dispossess. But when you have driven them out and settled in their land, ³⁰ and after they have been destroyed before you, be careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, "How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same." ³¹ You must not worship the LORD your God in their way, because in worshiping their gods, they

do all kinds of detestable things the LORD hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods.

³² See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it.

Indeed, Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1; Num. 3:4) were killed for presuming to worship God in a manner he had not indicated was acceptable. (In Lev. 10:1 the NIV misleadingly says "contrary to his command" instead of "that he had not commanded them.") As Timothy Ashley comments in *Numbers* in the New International Commentary on the Old Testament:

Nadab and Abihu offered incense in an improper manner before Yahweh and were consumed by fire from his presence. The problem was not that they offered incense when they were not qualified to do so. Ch. 8 relates their ordination as priests with all the rights and privileges of priests. The problem was that they offered incense "that Yahweh had not commanded them" (Lev. 10:1). They made this offering on their own, of their own free will, not in response to God's command. Thus the fire was *unacceptable* or "unauthorized."

The fact God has specified in the New Testament ways in which we are to worship him indicates that he still cares about the form of worship, that it is not a matter of indifference to him. If he simply had said "worship me" and not identified ways in which he desires to be worshiped, everyone would agree that all ways of worshipping him would be acceptable. But since he commanded specific ways of worship, one devoted to pleasing him should not risk displeasing him by worshipping in ways he has not commanded.

This approach is not based on a legalistically warped concept of God, seeing him as an angry king waiting to destroy erring subjects. The motivation is not fear but a desire to please. We do not value the exercise of our personal talents and tastes more than we value being certain of giving God what he desires. This attitude seems in keeping with the injunctions to worship with reverence and awe (Heb. 12:28) and to do everything in faith (Rom. 14:23; 2 Cor. 5:7), to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31), and in the name of the Lord Jesus (Col. 3:17).

If worship is cut loose from the mooring of biblical authorization, it becomes anthropocentric. The question is no longer what God desires to receive but what the worshiper desires to give to God. All forms of worship not expressly prohibited are acceptable (e.g., flagellation, cutting oneself, dancing, burning objects, acrobatics); there is no basis for objecting to any of them. Many Evangelicals recognize the danger here. As John MacArthur, Jr. put it:

My concern is this: The contemporary church's abandonment of *sola Scriptura* as the regulative principle [i.e., its abandonment of worshipping

only in ways that are authorized by Scripture] has opened the church to some of the grossest imaginable abuses – honkytonk church services, the carnival sideshow atmosphere, and wrestling exhibitions.

There is nothing in conditioning worship practices on an indication in Scripture that God desires or accepts them that requires head coverings, speaking in tongues, holy kissing, and raising hands in prayer. The claim that one should look to commands, inferences, and examples to discern whether God desires or accepts a practice does not entail (necessarily include) the claim that one is obligated to imitate all behavior of Christians recorded in the New Testament. Those are two distinct propositions. Conduct that is recorded with either explicit or implicit approval establishes that the conduct is authorized but does not mean it is mandatory.

The fact the disciples reclined at the table during the institution of the Lord's Supper (Lk. 22:14), for example, does not mean Christians are required to do so. It simply means that one could not object to the practice for lack of biblical authorization. Likewise, if one chose to greet with a holy kiss or to raise hands in prayer, one could not object to the practice for lack of biblical authorization.

So-called speaking in tongues, on the other hand, lacks authorization because what passes today for speaking in tongues is not the miraculous ability identified in the New Testament. Moreover, the absence of an interpreter would preclude "tongue speaking" in the assembly.

The question regarding head coverings is not whether they are required on the basis that one can infer from Paul's words that they were worn by Christian women in the first century. The indication that women wore head coverings merely would mean that one could not object to such coverings for lack of biblical authorization. The real question is whether head coverings are required today by virtue of Paul's command that they be worn by women when speaking in the assembly. Since Jones agrees this command does not mandate their use today, I will not spend time explaining why that is the case. Those interested in that sidelight can consult my online lessons on 1 Corinthians.

Nor is there anything in conditioning worship practices on an indication in Scripture that God desires or accepts them that precludes using things like church buildings and song books. The response to these kinds of charges of inconsistency falls into two categories, which at times overlap.

First, a general command permits or authorizes all ways of fulfilling it. For example, a general command to make noise when the king enters leaves one free to scream, stomp, clap, whistle, etc. But a specific command to make noise by applauding would restrict one to that particular means of making noise. Likewise, a general command to assemble authorizes all ways and places of assembling – in a building, in a home, standing, sitting, etc. – but a specific command to assemble in private homes would restrict one to private homes. A general command to sing authorizes all ways of singing – fast, slow, parts,

different melodies, etc. – but a specific command to sing in alternating responses would restrict one to that form.

Second, a command authorizes all aids to fulfilling it. That's part of the "how" of fulfilling the command. One is not doing something other than was commanded; one is using a certain tool to help obey or accomplish what was commanded. For example, a command to read authorizes the use of a magnifying glass that would aid in the fulfillment of that command. Likewise, a command to sing authorizes the use of song books and other things that would aid in fulfillment of that command.

That raises the question, of course, of whether musical instruments are permissible in Christian worship as an aid to fulfilling the command to sing. People in Churches of Christ generally do not think so. The claim that instrumental music aids in fulfilling the command to sing no more justifies using it in worship than the claim that animal sacrifice aids in fulfilling the command to teach justifies offering sacrifices each Lord's Day. Whatever aid those Jewish worship rituals may provide in fulfilling New Testament commands cannot be separated from the divine choice to supersede them, as though that ancillary function was outside of God's contemplation when he rendered those practices obsolete. The divinely willed obsolescence of musical instruments in worship ought not be nullified by a rationale that permits them to be used in precisely the same way as if they had not been rendered obsolete.

In addition, musical instruments are in fact not used to aid congregational singing. As in the Old Testament (1 Chron. 23:5; 2 Chron. 5:12-13, 7:6, 29:27-28), they are used for worshiping. This is obvious from the fact they are played when no one is singing, during entire songs or parts of songs. Even when there is vocal accompaniment, the instruments are used for their own contribution to the performance, not to facilitate the singing. This is evident from the fact the sounds they emit are far more complex than is necessary for aiding singing. Clearly, the goal is to produce a musical hybrid that is considered superior to a purely vocal rendition.

The truth of the matter is that instrumental music often has an adverse effect on congregational singing. The congregation tends to become an audience at a concert rather than participants in praise.

(7) The law of silence means that if the Bible is silent about something it is prohibited.

As shown above, this characterization of the principle by which musical instruments are excluded from Christian worship is so simplistic as to be misleading.

(8) Churches of Christ reason from the law of silence as follows:

(a) If the Bible is silent about something it is prohibited.

(b) The Bible is silent about the use of musical instruments in Christian worship.

(c) Therefore, the use of musical instruments in Christian worship is prohibited.

See the previous comment.

(9) The argument based on the law of silence does not establish the impropriety of using musical instruments in Christian worship because the law of silence is false or unproven as demonstrated by the fact it is not prescribed in Scripture and/or the fact it is rejected by the Christian Church.

Again, Jones's point is not readily apparent. After sketching the argument from the law of silence, he simply asks, "But again, does the Bible itself prescribe this interpretation?" I assume he is suggesting by that question that the law of silence is false or unproven because it is not prescribed in the Bible. But that is a *non sequitur*. Something can be true and not be prescribed in the Bible (e.g., rules of language, principles of logic).

Moreover, the idea that one should worship God only in ways he has indicated he desires or accepts, and thus not in ways about which he has given no such indication (about which he has been "silent"), is rooted in Scripture. The fact it is not spelled out in a particular verse does not mean it is not present.

Denying the need for biblical authorization in worship assumes that under the new covenant God is pleased with whatever form of worship mankind can devise. The claim is that under the new covenant God cares only about the heart or intentions of the worshiper in making an offering; he no longer cares anything about the form in which the heart or intent is expressed.

That may sound spiritual, but it is false. For example, regardless of one's motive and sincerity, one cannot participate in idol feasts (1 Cor. 10:18-22), cannot publicly pray while ignoring cultural sex distinctions in attire (1 Cor. 11:3-6), cannot speak in tongues in the assembly without an interpreter (1 Cor. 14:28), and in the case of women, cannot prophesy in the assembly (1 Cor. 14:33b-36).

Jones's comments about the Christian Church's view of the effect of silence are incoherent. He defines the law of silence as meaning "that if the Bible is silent about something, it is prohibited." He then says that Christian Churches believe if the Bible is silent about something one is free to practice it. In other words, the Christian Church *rejects* the law of silence as Jones defines it. Yet, Jones concludes (emphasis supplied), "It is evident that [the law of silence] doesn't settle the matter *even if we all agreed to it.*" I do not know what to make of this.

Of course, the fact the Christian Church denies a claim does not mean the claim is false. The Christian Church could be wrong. So just as a matter of logic, I do not see how the Christian Church's denial of the law of silence is relevant to Jones's attempt to undermine the deductive argument based on the law of silence.

(10) The law of exclusion means that if a matter is not mentioned in the New Testament it is excluded.

As shown above, this characterization of the interpretive principle by which musical instruments are excluded from Christian worship is so simplistic as to be misleading.

(11) Churches of Christ reason from the law of exclusion as follows:

(a) If a matter is not mentioned in the New Testament it is excluded.

(b) Using musical instruments in Christian worship is not mentioned in the New Testament.

(c) Therefore, using musical instruments in Christian worship is excluded.

See the previous comment.

(12) The argument based on the law of exclusion does not establish the impropriety of using musical instruments in Christian worship because the law of exclusion is false or unproven as demonstrated by the fact words are used in everyday speech with a nonexclusive sense (e.g., "I'm going to hear Willie Nelson sing tonight" does not mean he will sing without playing his guitar).

It is true that the failure to mention something need not imply its exclusion. However, the question is not whether in the abstract silence about a matter necessarily restrains one's conduct but whether in the context of Scripture the lack of any indication that God desires or accepts worship from Christians in the form of instrumental music should cause one not to use musical instruments.

As noted repeatedly above, Scripture and church history suggest that instrumental music was an integral part of the sacrificial worship of the Jewish temple that was superseded by the higher worship inaugurated by Christ. Whatever one believes about the effect of silence in some other theological context, certainly in this context it means that instruments should not be used in worship; something positive is needed to overturn the scriptural and historical presumption against their use.

In addition, the Old Testament makes clear that God is particular about the manner or form in which he is worshiped and that mankind is not free to worship him however it chooses. The fact he has specified in the New Testament ways in which we are to worship him indicates that he still cares about the form of worship, that it is not a

matter of indifference to him. The choice is to go beyond what God has revealed he desires or accepts, and thus risk displeasing him, or to offer him only what he has revealed he desires or accepts, and thus be certain of pleasing him (assuming, of course, that one is sincere). The latter seems the better course for one devoted to pleasing God.

(13) A principle of interpretation that is superior to "command, example, and necessary inference" is "command, principle, and Divine indifference." Under the latter, one would obey all commands, follow all eternal principles, and believe that some things do not matter one way or the other to God.

Jones previously mentioned the triad of "command, example, and necessary inference" as part of what he called the "pattern principle," which he defined as the belief that to bind any biblical teaching, one needs a command, example, or necessary inference. If one puts his new triad in place of the previous one, Jones's definition of the pattern principle becomes the belief that to bind any biblical teaching one needs a command, a principle, or divine indifference. Since that makes no sense, he obviously has altered the parallel in some way but has failed to explain it to his readers.

Everyone believes that some things are a matter of indifference to God. The question is whether the use of musical instruments in worship is among them. Presumably Jones believes that the application of "command, principle, and divine indifference" supports the use of instrumental music, but he offers no argument for that dubious proposition. Clearly the use of instruments is not commanded, and I am aware of no principle that mandates their use. To throw them in the category of "divine indifference" is to assume the very matter in dispute, namely whether they are in fact a matter of divine indifference. So I do not see how Jones's new triad is helpful.

(14) Post-modern Christians who are not rooted in the type of interpretation that relies on deductive reasoning believe it does not matter to God whether one worships with instruments as long as one worships him from one's heart. The only question with which they are concerned is whether the music leads them to the one true God.

Jones here seems to be arguing that musical instruments are acceptable to God because post-modern Christians believe God is indifferent about the form of one's worship and cares only about the heart with which that worship is offered. There is much wrong with this. (If that is not what he is arguing, I do not see the relevance of his statements.)

As stated above, the idea that God cares *only* about the worshiper's heart is false. For example, regardless of one's motive and sincerity, one cannot participate in idol feasts (1 Cor. 10:18-22), cannot publicly pray while ignoring cultural sex distinctions in attire (1 Cor. 11:3-6), cannot speak in tongues in the assembly without an interpreter (1 Cor. 14:28), and in the case of women, cannot prophesy in the assembly (1 Cor. 14:33b-36).

If one accepts as true the claim that God cares *only* about the worshiper's heart, one is accepting as true that *all* forms of worship may be acceptable to God, even the obsolete shadows of the old covenant worship system. Under that view, animal sacrifices can still be a sweet aroma to God, as long as the worshiper intends them to be so. Again, the anthropocentric strain is unmistakable.

In addition, the truth of a matter is not determined by the belief of post-modern Christians (or anyone else). That is nothing but relativism. If post-modern Christians believe, for example, that God is indifferent about the need for baptism, it does not mean baptism is a matter of indifference to God. The question is whether the belief of the post-modern Christians is correct. One should conform one's beliefs to what is true, not define what is true by one's beliefs.

(15) The lack of definitive rules of interpretation is a good thing because the uncertainty keeps us dependent on the Holy Spirit to lead us to truth. The very attempt to develop principles for interpreting Scripture is an act of profound human arrogance.

The lack of "definitive rules of interpretation" does not prevent Jones from being "very convicted" about the correctness of his understanding that musical instruments are a matter of indifference to God or from publishing a booklet explaining why those who disagree with him are wrong. Apparently the "basic hermeneutical principles" to which he alludes (in contrast to "a single authoritative method of interpretation" or "definitive rules of interpretation") are sufficient to allow him to grasp with confidence the truth of God's indifference to instrumental music in worship. So I do not understand how he can suggest that the lack of "definitive rules of interpretation" renders untrustworthy conclusions about the propriety of instrumental music. Does it render untrustworthy only the conclusions of those who disagree with him? (If he is not suggesting that the lack of definitive rules of interpretation renders untrustworthy conclusions about the propriety of instrumental music, I do not see how his comments are relevant to the case he is presenting.)

There is even a deeper level of confusion here. If the attempt to develop principles for interpreting Scripture is a bad thing, "an act of profound human arrogance" that somehow hinders illumination by the Spirit, why is that not true for the development of the "basic hermeneutical principles" on which Jones presumably relies in concluding confidently that God is indifferent to instrumental music in worship? The idea that developing principles by which to comprehend the meaning of a biblical author hinders the search for truth by lessening one's dependence on the Holy Spirit ignores the fact that in comprehending what the biblical author meant to convey one is comprehending truth given by the Spirit. Jones has swallowed the false dichotomy pitched by Rick Joyner, who teaches that miraculous gifts are bestowed today in a post-conversion "baptism of the Holy Spirit," who purports to prophesy, and who is considered a false teacher by many outside Churches of Christ (see, e.g., <http://www.apologeticsindex.org/about.html>).

I suspect that lurking behind this is the incorrect notion that the indwelling Spirit is necessary for one to grasp the correct meaning of a biblical text. The thinking seems to something like: since the Spirit is indispensable for understanding the meaning of a biblical text, it is the Spirit who is revealing that meaning; and since the Spirit reveals the meaning, mere human efforts to discern it through the application of interpretive principles can only interfere with that revelation. Taken to its logical extreme, this means that one should abandon all interpretive efforts so as to provide the Spirit an unfettered opportunity to make the meaning of a text known. That sounds spiritual, but as Bernard Ramm pointed out decades ago, it is in reality a veiled egotism that refuses to learn from those who have labored in the mine of biblical scholarship.

The truth is that the meaning of a biblical text can be discerned even by those without the Spirit through the application of principles of hermeneutics and techniques of exegesis. So the foundational premise of this view is mistaken. The Spirit's work of illumination lies in impressing on one the value or significance of that meaning. See, e.g., Robert Stein's discussion in *Playing by the Rules: A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 65-69.

(16) Methods of interpretation that consistently have resulted in division or disharmony presumptively are suspect and in need of reexamination.

In choosing to communicate to mankind through human languages, God has made interpretation an unavoidable task. If Jones has a method of interpretation that can unite people in the truth of Scripture better than what has heretofore been hammered out by centuries of scholars, he should not keep it a secret. Certainly his vague remarks about "command, principle, and divine indifference" and his suggestion that the effort to develop sound interpretive principles is a misguided usurpation of the leading of the Spirit do not help.

Chapter Three is where Jones lays out the biblical case for his claim that God is indifferent about the use of musical instruments in Christian worship. I again provide in bold type a numbered list of the points Jones makes (as best I can determine). My comments are interspersed in normal type.

(1) Instrumental music was a divinely prescribed part of Jewish temple worship.

That is true, but that is not an indication that God desires or accepts their use in Christian worship. On the contrary, Scripture suggests that instrumental music was a divinely prescribed part of the Jewish sacrificial system that was rendered obsolete by Christ, and church history reinforces that interpretation. See my online paper "Music in Christian Worship."

(2) Instrumental music is used for worship in the heavenly scenes of Revelation.

In the first place, it is doubtful that instrumental music is used for worship in the heavenly visions of Revelation. I submit that the reference in Rev. 15:2 (the text cited by Jones) to the victors "having harps of God" is not a picture of them holding harps given to them by God but is a metaphorical reference to them having voices animated by the human spirit under the direction of the Spirit of God.

In Rev. 14:2 singing was said to be *like* the sound of harpists playing their harps, so there already is an association in Revelation between the voice and a harp. Moreover, Revelation is apocalyptic literature, so this kind of description would not be out of place. In fact, just a century after Revelation was written, Clement of Alexandria described the tongue as "the psalter of the Lord" and said the kithara (harp) was "the mouth struck by the Spirit, as it were by a plectrum."

In addition, there is no mention of these harps being played. The text merely reports that those having "God's harps" are singing. Given that the church never used musical instruments in worship and saw the human voice as the instrument best suited for worshipping a God who is spirit, it would be primed to understand "God's harps" as a metaphor for the singing capacity of the Spirit-filled Christian.

Secondly, even if instrumental music was used for worship in the heavenly visions of Revelation, it would not mean instrumental music is appropriate for the earthly worship of the church. Jones states that he "would have always argued" that these heavenly visions could not be used to justify worship practices in the earthly church, but he does not indicate whether he now thinks that argument is invalid. In case he does, I will note briefly why I think his former understanding was correct.

In Revelation there is incense in golden bowls and golden censers (5:8, 8:3), a golden altar (8:3), a temple (11:19), and the ark of the covenant (11:19). If one claims that everything in Revelation is suitable for Christian worship, then these items must be suitable as well. But that clearly is incorrect because the old covenant cult specifically is shown in the New Testament to be suboptimal and temporary. In other words, one can be sure that the apocalyptic depiction of heavenly worship by analogs of the earthly, old covenant cult does not mean the earthly, old covenant cult is a perpetually suitable form of worship. So it is not valid to claim that the presence of instrumental music, which was part of the old covenant cult, means that instrumental music is a perpetually suitable form of worship.

(3) It is inconsistent to claim that the use of instrumental music in worship is prohibited by the lack of any indication that God desires or accepts the practice (lack of biblical "authorization") and to claim that congregational singing and the use of song books are permissible despite the lack of any indication that God desires or accepts those practices.

This is a reiteration of point (6) from Chapter Two; the reader is referred to that discussion. In a nutshell, there is no inconsistency because Scripture and church history suggest that instrumental music was an integral part of the sacrificial worship of the

Jewish temple that was superseded by the higher worship inaugurated by Christ. Whatever one believes about the effect of silence in some other theological context, certainly in this context it means that instruments should not be used in worship. Moreover, a general command to sing authorizes all ways of singing, including congregationally, and authorizes all aids to fulfilling that command, including song books. On the other hand, a command to sing does not authorize something other than singing (i.e., playing instruments). Playing instruments cannot be justified as an aid to singing because doing so would nullify their divinely willed obsolescence and because that is not how they are in fact used.

(4) The early church worshiped with musical instruments when it met together in the temple courts.

Musical instruments were played in the Jewish temple by Levitical musicians in association with the offering of sacrifices. These musicians certainly were not Christians. The fact Christians met in the temple courts no more associates them with worshiping with instrumental music than it associates them with the offering of animal sacrifices or any other aspect of temple worship.

(5) Since in the first century *psallō* "still meant musical instruments" or "could still be used for instrumental music," it is unreasonable to believe that when Paul used *psallō* in Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16 he intended "to prohibit instrumental music."

It is not easy to follow the connection between some of Jones's statements in this section. The above is my best shot at divining his point. Again, there is much confusion here.

Just for the record, Jones errs when he states that *psallō* is used in Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16. Paul uses that word only in Rom. 15:9, 1 Cor. 14:15 (twice), and Eph. 5:19. Jones also errs when he states that *psallō* is translated "psalms" in Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16. *Psallō* is a verb. The word translated "psalms" in those verses is the noun *psalmos*.

Contrary to Jones's assertion, *psallō* never meant musical instruments or instrumental music. Those are nouns, whereas *psallō* is a verb. The root meaning of the word is "pluck," and in classical Greek it most frequently meant to play a stringed instrument (plucking it with the fingers), but it also could be used in a broader sense of making music in other ways. The word evolved to mean simply "sing" or "sing praises" without any connotation of an instrument. Under this meaning, one could "*psallō*" with or without instrumental accompaniment, but the use of instruments was not inherent in the word. Something in addition to *psallō* was required to infer their use. (For a good treatment of the history and meanings of *psallō*, see Everett Ferguson, *A Cappella Music*, 2nd ed. [Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1988], 1-27.)

This shift in meaning is evident well before the first century A.D., and the context of the uses of *psallō* in the New Testament makes clear that its means sing or sing praises. Thus, in Rom. 15:9 and 1 Cor. 14:15 it is translated sing, sing praise(s), or sing hymns in the

KJV, ASV, RSV, NEB, NIV, REB, NASU, NKJV, NRSV, and ESV. In Eph. 5:19 it is translated making melody or make music (in your heart) in all of these translations. The only other occurrence in the New Testament is Jas. 5:13, where it is translated sing praise(s), sing songs of praise, or sing psalms in the same translations.

If one contends that instrumental music is an inherent part of *psallō* as used in the New Testament, then Christians are *obligated* to sing with instrumental accompaniment. But that is not what Jones contends; he claims the use of instruments is *optional*. So he acknowledges tacitly that instrumental accompaniment is not inherent in the New Testament uses of *psallō*.

Jones seems to be claiming that *psallō* cannot be shown *affirmatively to exclude* the use of instruments, but assuming that is correct, it misses the point. The point is that the absence of any connotation of instrumental accompaniment – the fact instrumental music is not an inherent part of the word – means that *psallō* cannot be taken as an indication that God desires or accepts the use of instrumental music in Christian worship. The practice is left without divine authorization.

If preachers and Sunday school teachers assured Jones that in the first century *psallō* could not be used to mean "pluck an instrument," they were wrong. The word could be used that way, but as Jones recognizes, it certainly was not used that way in the New Testament. If realizing he had been misled on this point was a factor in Jones's recent conversion to the instrumental view, one wonders how it could have escaped his attention for so long, given that he went to graduate school and this fact has long been noted by scholars, including those in Churches of Christ.

Jones is misguided in claiming that Churches of Christ are inconsistent when they insist on the original meaning of *baptizō* but not on the original meaning of *psallō*. The "original meaning" of *baptizō* on which Churches of Christ (and many others) insist is the meaning of the word in first-century usage; the "original meaning" of *psallō* Jones has in mind is the meaning from an earlier period.

Jones objects to anyone saying "that one is not biblical simply because [that person] believes instrumental music is acceptable in worship." Yet, Jones is willing to say that his new viewpoint that God is indifferent to the use of musical instruments in worship is "more biblical." I think that in saying one is "not biblical" most people mean what Jones means in saying that his view is "more biblical"; they believe the other person has mishandled the Bible. If Jones's point is that we ought not doubt the faith and devotion of those with whom we disagree on this issue, I say "amen." But we still are left with our disagreement.

Chapter Four is where Jones addresses the absence of musical instruments in church history. I will stick with the format of providing in bold type a numbered list of the points Jones makes and interspersing comments.

(1) The early church appears not to have used musical instruments in worship, but practices must be determined by Scripture rather than church history.

The exclusion of musical instruments is indeed based on Scripture, as I have tried to explain above. The role of church history is corroborative. If one's interpretation is on the right track, one would expect to find some confirmation in church history. The fact musical instruments were not used in Christian worship for at least 600 years (and almost certainly for 900 or more) is a strong indicator that those who insist on a *cappella* worship are drawing the proper lessons from the Bible.

(2) The fact one's heart can be involved when one worships with instrumental music means that instrumental music was not one of the aspects of Jewish temple worship that was superseded by Christ.

This reasoning would justify the continued use of sacrifices, altars, burnt offerings, and incense. All of them can be employed by one who is worshipping from the heart. The fact Jones recognizes that these things were superseded by Christ shows that the ability to employ them in heartfelt worship is not the criterion for their continued acceptability.

The writer of Hebrews makes clear that, along with the old covenant itself, the ceremonies of old covenant worship – the external, material elements of that worship – have been superseded by the higher worship inaugurated by Christ. Singing is continued in Christian worship despite its association with temple worship because it differs from playing instruments in spiritually significant ways. Specifically, singing, like all speech, is an internal, immediate expression of the rational element of the inner man, the spirit, whereas instrumental music is an external, noncommunicative sound made through an inanimate, manmade object. As Niceta, a Latin-speaking leader in the Western church, wrote in the early fifth century:

Only what is material [from the Old Testament] has been rejected, such as circumcision, the Sabbath, sacrifices, discrimination in foods; and also trumpets, kitharas, cymbals, and tympana, which now understood as the limbs of a man resound with a more perfect music. Daily ablutions, new moon observances, the meticulous inspection of leprosy, along with anything else which was temporarily necessary for the immature are past and over with. But whatever is spiritual [from the Old Testament], such as faith, devotion, prayer, fasting, patience, chastity, and psalm-singing has been increased rather than diminished.

Related to that point is the fact singing is a form of speaking (Eph. 5:19) in that it is verbal communication. The words of praise that are sung are understandable and thus are able to build up the gathered saints. According to 1 Corinthians 14, the reason tongues are forbidden in the worship assembly, unless they are translated, is that noncommunicative speech cannot edify others. To those who do not understand the language, tongues simply are sounds that convey no message. The same holds for instrumental music. It is sound that, however beautiful, conveys no message.

(3) Given that musical instruments were commanded for use in Jewish temple worship and used in the heavenly visions of Revelation, there is no reason for them to be excluded in Christian times.

Jones believes that certain elements of the old covenant cult – things like the temple, incense, and altars – were rendered obsolete by Christ, and yet these things appear in the heavenly visions of Revelation. So I am puzzled why he insists that musical instruments are exempt from the same principle that allows him to exclude other Jewish worship practices.

I have explained above why the heavenly visions of Revelation cannot bear the weight Jones places on them. I will not repeat all of that here.

(4) Since the Old Testament was the first Scripture of the church, and since the Psalms encouraged the use of musical instruments, there was no place where the early Christians could have received teaching that instrumental music was inappropriate.

I assume Jones does not believe that animal sacrifices can be justified in the church on the theory that the earliest Christians' use of the Old Testament meant they could not have received teaching that sacrifices were inappropriate. He recognizes in the case of sacrifices (and no doubt other things) that Jesus and the Spirit revealed things to the early church about the new covenant prior to the writing of New Testament documents. Since there is no reason to think that the obsolescence of Jewish worship rituals was unknown until the embodiment of that concept in New Testament documents, there is no basis to claim that prior to the writing of those documents the early Christians could not have received teaching that instrumental music was inconsistent with new covenant worship.

Aspects of Christ's impact on the old covenant cult certainly may have been revealed progressively, but that cannot be used to nullify what ultimately was revealed. And what was revealed is that Christ rendered obsolete the external, material rituals of Jewish temple worship. Given the close connection between instrumental music and sacrifices in the Jewish temple, there is every reason to believe they were among the superseded accompaniments to that worship.

(5) The early church's nonuse of musical instruments was not because they believed there was anything wrong with using them. It simply was a preference they inherited from the synagogue.

There are good reasons to doubt this explanation. The reader can consult my online paper "Music in Christian Worship" for details. I will just sketch the points here. First, there is no evidence of singing in the early synagogue, which means the early church could have added instruments to its worship as easily as it added singing. Second, the church in Scripture is analogized to the temple (which used instruments) not the synagogue. Third, it is very difficult to believe that a mere preference would be practiced, through time and across cultures, as uniformly as was *a cappella* worship. Fourth, early explanations of the nonuse of instrument do not mention the synagogue.

(6) The argument that Christians should sing without instruments because that is how they sang in the synagogue is invalid.

I agree, all the more so given that there is no evidence of singing in the synagogue in the first century.

(7) One should not argue against instrumental music in Christian worship because the Pharisees argued against instrumental music in temple worship.

This is a *non sequitur*. The fact the Pharisees were wrong to argue against instrumental music in the temple, something ordained by God, does not mean it is wrong to argue against instrumental music in Christian worship. The latter is based on the salvation-historical impact of the Lord Jesus.

(8) It is possible that the church's nonuse of musical instruments in worship was for the same reasons they were excluded from the synagogue, namely that it would violate the prohibition against working on the Sabbath and/or would violate the ban on instruments imposed after the destruction of the Jewish temple in A.D. 70.

Since the church's principal day of assembly was the Lord's Day rather than the Sabbath, I do not see how the Sabbath prohibition can be relevant. Beyond that, the binding of Sabbath regulations is inconsistent with the New Testament's abrogation of the Sabbath commandment in texts like Col. 2:16-17, Gal. 4:8-11, and Rom. 14:1-12.

The alleged abandonment of instrumental music after the destruction of the temple is most likely a myth. As noted above, there is no evidence of singing in the synagogue of the first century, which means the absence of instruments predates A.D. 70. Moreover, early explanations of the nonuse of instrument in Christian worship do not mention the destruction of the temple. In addition, this could not explain why the church did not use musical instruments during its first forty years.

Chapter Five is Jones's response to the claim of some that instrumental music should not be used in Christian worship because it is a form of entertainment and thus is inconsistent with the nature of worship.

(1) It is inconsistent to approve of sermons that are entertaining and to disapprove of instrumental music *because* it is entertaining.

I consider the entertainment objection to the use of musical instruments in worship to be peripheral. The central objections are those expressed above. The objection, as I understand it, is not that instrumental music is incidentally entertaining but that it too readily becomes essentially entertainment. The "praise band" performs for the audience and the audience becomes spectators at a concert, people focused on the talent and creation of the musicians, rather than participants in worship. Jones argues that this danger is not limited to congregations that worship with musical instruments, but the

question is whether the danger is significantly greater in instrumental congregations. It seems obvious to me that it is, but Jones seems to disagree.

The story Jones recounts about Matt Redman is telling. Redman's band became so popular that it started touring, and fans of the band would skip the worship service when the band was out of town. The band became such a focus of the assembly that the pastor banned instrumental performances in the assembly. Commenting on that action, Jones writes, "By stripping all the externals away, the people started realizing what worship was truly about." If banning instrumental music helps people to realize what worship truly is about and if musical instruments are an external thing that can pull them away from that realization, I do not see the wisdom of worshiping with instruments.

(2) We should be tolerant of different styles of music.

If Jones's point is that one should not deny the salvation, motives, and faith of those on the other side of the keyboard, I agree. If his point is that those in Churches of Christ ought to abandon their conviction that worshiping God with instrumental music is wrong, I disagree. The "styles of music" we ought to accept are styles of *singing*.

(3) None of the churches that are part of a new movement of going back to the Bible have concluded that musical instruments are wrong, which suggests that the real reason Churches of Christ do not use them has nothing to do with the Bible.

Jones has complained repeatedly about people in Churches of Christ asserting that a person is "not biblical" simply because he believes instrumental music is acceptable in worship. He says it is hurtful and something for which we need to repent. Yet, here Jones suggests (by a rhetorical question) that the nonuse of instruments by Churches of Christ has nothing to do with the Bible. Is that not saying that our practice is unbiblical?

I have no way to verify the accuracy of Jones's assertion about the doctrinal beliefs of churches that are part of a "new movement," but assuming what he says is correct, the fact those churches use musical instruments is not evidence that the Church of Christ rejects them for some unbiblical reason. After lecturing the Church of Christ on the matter, Jones should realize that a difference in worship practices need not mean that one side is motivated by something other than the Bible. If one opens that door, then certainly a case can be made that the new movement is motivated by a cultural bias that hinders their fair examination of the question.

And why judge the practice by some recent movement born in America rather than by the broad sweep of Christian history? As Everett Ferguson concluded regarding the history of instrumental music in worship:

The classical form of church music is unaccompanied song. To abstain from the use of the instrument is not a peculiar aberration of 'a frontier American sect': this was easily, until comparatively recent times, the majority tradition in Christian history. Virtually no one has said it is

wrong to worship *a cappella*, whereas many have thought instrumental music in worship is wrong.

I also suspect that if Jones digs into these churches he quickly will find that they embrace things he believes are errors. In that case, will Jones conclude that they must be right? After all, they are "going back to the Bible."

Chapter Six is Jones's historical take on the division between the Christian Church and the Church of Christ.

(1) The Christian Church and the Church of Christ really divided over the Civil War "and covered it up with this issue [instrumental music] instead of admitting the real reason."

I have grave doubts about that view, but I am not about to tackle that subject in this review. The reader can consult the relevant historical studies, including Earl West's *In Search of the Ancient Order* and J. E. Choate and William Woodson's *Sounding Brass and Clanging Cymbals: The History and Significance of Instrumental Music in the Restoration Movement (1827-1968)*.

(2) It is strange that something as peripheral as instrumental music in worship can evoke such emotion.

The fact something may be "peripheral" in the sense it is not damning does not mean it is unimportant. No aspect of God's will is trivial. The goal of disciples is not to displease God as much as possible without going to hell; it is to please him as much as possible.

The reason instrumental music is so emotional is that it involves the public worship assembly. As Howard Norton wrote (*Christian Chronicle*, Jan. 1993, C-16):

The public worship assembly is critical to our unity as a brotherhood. It always has been. Because of this we must be exceedingly careful when we tamper with it in any way. We are very resilient in churches of Christ when the issues on which we disagree fall outside the public assembly of the saints. When controversial practices enter the public assembly, however, everyone is affected; and the possibility for division and shattering is scary.

If people like Jones succeed in persuading leaders in the congregation I attend to embrace instrumental music in worship, I will be forced to attend elsewhere. That does not seem to concern those in the instrumental-music lobby. That is just part of the price of "enlightening" the church toward unshackled praise.

(3) As some in the Church of Christ (like Jones) "are now moving toward unity and reconciliation, others will emerge to keep the arguments alive and people apart."

In a booklet arguing that those who believe it is wrong to use musical instruments in Christian worship are in error, Jones criticizes as divisive those who would defend the *a cappella* view. Jones seems to be saying, in effect: "If people in the Church of Christ would, as I did, change their minds about instrumental music we would be united on that issue. By disputing my claims and arguments, one is keeping people from agreeing with me and thus keeping them from being united. Since keeping people from being united is a bad thing, one should not dispute my claims and arguments." Amazing! If it is divisive to defend the *a cappella* view, how can it not be divisive to promote the instrumental-music view?

In the **Conclusion**, Jones reiterates that he does not believe the *a cappella* position is supported by the Bible.

(1) "[I]f instrumental music is not wrong" then its evangelistic potential weighs in favor of its use.

That may be, but its perceived evangelistic potential should not bias the biblical inquiry into its propriety.

(2) Young people are leaving the Restoration Movement because of its music.

Jones writes, "So many young people are leaving the Restoration Movement and going to churches that really don't hold the ideals of our background. Most of them tell me that they leave because of the music." If young people are leaving the Restoration Movement, which includes Christian Churches, then obviously they are leaving for some reason other than a failure to use musical instruments. If instrumental music were the real issue, they would not leave Christian Churches, which use musical instruments, and if they left a Church of Christ they would join a Christian Church rather than a group that was not part of the Restoration Movement. So I do not see how this helps the case for the use of instrumental music.

If Jones meant to say that young people are leaving Churches of Christ because those churches do not use instrumental music in worship, I would like to see some support for that. Assuming that is true, it highlights our failure to teach adequately the biblical reasons for not using instrumental music in worship. We have been so afraid of appearing to be majoring in minors that we found it convenient to assume that everyone already understood the position. We now have churches full of people who believe our objection to instrumental music is a mere Restoration tradition.

In the story about Matt Redman, Jones acknowledged that musical instruments are an external thing unrelated to what worship truly is about. That being so, if young people are leaving Churches of Christ because of a lack of instrumental music, it says their

priorities are misplaced, they are valuing an external thing more than the heart of worship. Rather than feeding that misplaced priority by introducing instrumental music, why not teach them about the heart of worship so they will be content without them?

I leave it to the reader to judge whether Jones delivered on his promise to present compelling reasons for the conclusion that God is indifferent about instrumental music in Christian worship. I obviously think he did not. In my opinion, this booklet is poorly reasoned and poorly written. I say without ill will that if it represents the thorough study the leaders of Jones's congregation did before he taught the congregation that instrumental music was an acceptable way of worshiping God, I think the congregation was shortchanged.