Music in Worship
During the Reformation

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Those who were involved in the Reformation, who were attempting to bring the sixteenth-century Church into agreement with the Scriptures, faced the question of using instrumental music in worship. This had become the practice of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church had introduced into worship the use of images, incense, candles, relics, and much more. The early English reformer John Wycliffe (c. 1328–84) favored unaccompanied singing,¹ as also did John Huss (c. 1369–1415) of Bohemia, who supported congregational singing.²

Martin Luther (1483–1546), the German monk who became the most prominent member of the Reformation Movement, was indifferent to the use of both images and instruments. In his opinion, these were matters of liberty in worship. Gerhard Carlstadt (c. 1480–1541), also a German, opposed them. He contended that the player of the instrument could not worship if he was busy attending to music matters. Carlstadt advocated the unaccompanied singing of songs by the entire congregation.

Huldrech Zwingli (1484–1531), in Zurich, Switzerland, took an important stand. Although he was an accomplished musician, Zwingli insisted that only what Christ had commanded in the New Testament should be part of the worship of the church. Whatever is added to Christ’s command, he asserted, is an abuse. In response to such teaching, the organ ceased to be used in some worship services. However, since Zwingli interpreted Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 as speaking of inward singing in the heart and not with the voice, he also terminated vocal singing in the Church in Zurich. He used musical instruments for pleasure at home. Heinrich Bullinger (1504–75), Zwingli’s successor in Zurich, also opposed the use of instrumental music in the Church.

John Calvin (1509–64), who led Reformation efforts in France and Switzerland, stated, “We may not adopt any device which seems fit to ourselves, but look to the injunctions of Him who alone is entitled to prescribe.”³ With no command or example for the use of mechanical instruments in the New Testament, we have no authority to bring them into the church. Calvin was not opposed to the private use of instruments, just to using them in the Christian assembly. Theodore Beza (1519–1605), Calvin’s successor in Geneva, also opposed using instruments in worship.

In what is called today the Radical Reformation, Menno Simons (c. 1496–1561), in the Netherlands, opposed anything that is not expressly commanded in the Scriptures. John Knox (c. 1514–72) promoted similar views in Scotland. The Scottish reformed churches became vigorous opponents of the instrument. The early English reformers opposed instruments, though the English Church eventually adopted the practice of using them. Early Puritans, who regulated their practices according to commands and ex-

amples found in the New Testament, opposed them.\textsuperscript{4}

American Puritans, including the Boston Puritans, also held that view. Cotton Mather (1663–1728) said, “There is not one word of institution in the New Testament for instrumental musick in the worship of God.”\textsuperscript{5}

Other opposition is seen in the writings of the well-known Methodist commentator Matthew Henry (1661–1714), who would not approve of either music or dancing. He saw the two as going together. Isaac Watts (1674–1748), the first popular English hymn writer, opposed arguments for instrumental music that were based on their use in the Old Testament and in Revelation. Charles Spurgeon (1834–92), a renowned Baptist preacher, rejected musical instruments as late as 1880. In conjunction with a discussion of Psalm 42:4, he commented, “We might as well pray by machinery as praise by it.”\textsuperscript{6}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{5}Cotton Mather, \textit{The Great Works of Christ in America} (London: N.p., 1702; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 2:266.
\item \textsuperscript{6}Charles H. Spurgeon, \textit{The Treasury of David} (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1957), 1:272.
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