

Old Light On New Worship

A Book Review

David P. Stevens

Old Light on New Worship: Musical Instruments and the Worship of God, A Theological, Historical and Psychological Study by John Price, Avinger, TX: Simpson Publishing Co., 2007, 256 pp. \$15.99.

For members of the church of Christ, John Price provides a fresh breeze of honest investigation into a long debated subject related to worship—the use of instruments of music in worship to God. While our brotherhood has struggled with this question for more than a century, it is interesting and informative to know that other religious groups have taken up the question with new zeal. Price writes from a reformed perspective. He is a graduate of Trinity Ministerial Academy in Montville, New Jersey. He currently serves as the Pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Rochester, New York.

The format of the hardback book includes six chapters that discuss the regulative principle applied to musical instruments, the history of musical instruments in the Christian Church, the psychology of music, the true glory of Gospel worship, the exalted place of singing in the church, and arguments in favor of instrumental music considered. Price gives a conclusion and adds three appendices covering an exhortation to unity, some suggestions for reformation and how shall we sing? The book includes an index of names and a bibliography.

In chapter one, Price demonstrates the necessity for having biblical authority from God for any act of worship. He shows that under the Old Testament, God authorized the use of instrumental music. He authorized trumpets under Moses. Some years later, he authorized specific musical instruments under David. God regulated the use of instruments in worship under the Old Testament. In the New Testament, God has not given any instructions for the use of instruments of music in worship. How do we interpret this silence? Martin Luther followed the principle that whatever is not expressly forbidden by Scripture is permissible (p. 87). Huldreich Zwingli believed that only what Christ has explicitly commanded in His Word should be part of the worship of the church (p. 90). Zwingli's concept more closely fits the regulatory principle set forth by the apostle Paul in Colossians 3:17, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." Price states, "There is no record in Scripture of a musical instrument ever being used in public worship without an explicit divine command" (p. 17). Price shows three important points: (1) The Old Testament worship in all its outward ceremonies and rituals has been abolished; (2) We must look to Christ and His apostles alone for the worship of the church; and (3) With no command, example, or any indication whatsoever from the Lord Jesus that He desires musical instruments in His church, we have no warrant for their use" (p. 17).

In chapter two, an exhaustive history of the use (or in this case the non-use) of instruments of music in worship is given. Price covers the history of the use of instruments in the Jewish synagogue; the rejection of musical instruments by the early church fathers; the rise of musical instruments during the Dark Ages; the Protestant Reformation, the Puritan Era, the 18th and 19th centuries; the 20th century to today. This chapter makes a tremendous contribution to our knowledge of the use of the instrument in worship since the days of the apostles. Price shows that the silence of the New Testament with regard to the use of instruments of music in worship shows that they were not used. The early church Fathers condemned their use and

forbade their use. Price lists twenty-one names of the church Fathers in his index. The Council of Laodicea (367) forbade the use of musical instruments in worship and this has remained the policy of the Eastern Orthodox Church to the present day (p. 76). Price documents that the first use of a musical instrument in Christian worship was an organ introduced in about 670 in a Roman Catholic Church in Rome by Pope Vitalianus (p. 79). The second occasion of an instrument's being used in church worship occurred in 812, when Pepin's son, Charlemagne, had a copy of a previously gifted organ made for the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Aix-la-Chapelle (p. 80). By the 9th century, only two organs had been used in Christian worship. Price affirms, "There was no general acceptance of it in the churches until at least the late 1200's" (p. 80). It was during the 14th and 15th centuries that the organ gained prominence in the worship of the Roman Catholic Church (p. 82). The historical fact is that instruments of music in worship were not an accepted part of worship for over 1300 years!

Price thoroughly traces the men and the history of instrumental music during the Reformation period. He shows that Martin Luther was not opposed to the use of instruments of music in worship. Luther was clearly in a minority. Most of the reformers opposed the use of instruments of music. Among them Price lists: Carlstadt, Zwingli (Swiss Reformation), Bullinger, Calvin (Swiss Reformation), Beza, Simons, Mohler, Zepperus, Pareus, Horne, Marbeck, and Knox (Scottish Reformed churches).

The march through history continues with the Puritans. Price shows that the majority of Puritans held the view that instruments of music were unacceptable in worship. Among them were men such as Robert Browne, John Owen and John Bunyan, Samuel Rutherford, Thomas Manton, Matthew Henry, Benjamin Keach, Isaac Watts (the famous hymn composer), John Gill, and Charles Spurgeon. Among the Puritans, only Richard Baxter is mentioned as being in favor of instruments of music.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, churches began to adopt the practice of using instruments in the worship. This was a clear departure from earlier centuries. Price states that the first Puritan church to have an organ was the First Congregational Church in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1770 (p. 129). The first organ used in a Baptist church was about 1820 in Pawtucket, Rhode Island (p. 130). The Scottish Presbyterian churches, founded by John Knox in the 16th century did not use instruments of music for over three hundred years. However, under the influence of Dwight L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey, instruments began to be used. This was in connection with their evangelistic tour of the British Isles in 1873. Opposition to the instrument continued through this time as well and Price documents this fact.

The piano came into prominence during the 20th century in many American and English churches. Church people were influenced by a cultural evolution in the music industry. Worship became more performance oriented. After World War II, the radio and recording industries in America expanded and music styles developed that would have profound effects on worship in American churches. Price states, "the entire ethos of the world had found its way into the church through music" (p. 139). Rock-and-roll had invaded the church. *Contemporary Christian Music* used the rhythms and beats of this popular musical style to attract young and old alike. Contemporary music which used drums and electric guitars became an integral element of the church growth movement in America. The community church movement today relies heavily upon contemporary music and contemporary worship styles to attract an audience. Worship has become entertainment oriented with emphasis placed upon pleasing one's fleshly appetites. Contemporary Christian music is sensual and worldly. This may be the reason that some religious groups are taking a second look at the whole issue of church music in worship.

In chapter three, Price looks at the psychology of music. The power of music to influence beliefs and impact emotions has been underestimated by church leaders today. Price quotes Augustine concerning the problem of being attracted by the melody rather than the content of the words of a psalm, “When it so happens that I am moved more by the singing than by what is sung, I confess that I have sinned, in such wise as to deserve punishment, and at such times I should prefer not to listen to a singer” (p. 158). The danger is that the emotions are stirred without raising the affections of the soul.

Chapter four focuses on the true glory of gospel worship. Price contrasts worship under the Old Testament with worship under the New Testament. Worship under the Old Testament depended more on outward sights and sounds to stir the emotions and senses. Worship under the New Testament is more spiritual. Instead of entering into the physical Temple to worship, Christians today enter into the presence of God in heaven.

Chapter five addresses the exalted place of singing in worship. Price gives the following five ways that Jesus has exalted singing in worship: (1) by His own example; (2) by His singing with us in the church; (3) by making singing a teaching ministry; (4) by the power He has sent upon His singing people; and (5) by making singing a foretaste of heaven. Price states, “True singing is a labor that involves the exertion of spiritual energy on the part of every member of the congregation. Indolence and carelessness is (sic) unacceptable, and we should spare no pain to insure that Christ is honored in His ordinance” (p. 186).

In chapter six, Price examines twelve arguments for the use of instruments in worship and attempts to answer each. He addresses two arguments at length. The first is that the use of instruments of music falls under the category of spiritual liberty and expediency. The second is that the use of instruments of music is authorized by the Greek words *psallo* and *psalms*. Price does an admirable job of refuting both of these points. Then, he takes up ten more arguments and refutes each of them. Price states, “It should be recognized that even the use of a single musical instrument in worship is a violation of the regulative principle of worship and can easily lead to the introduction of various other instruments along with it” (p. 221).

Price gives a good summary of his arguments throughout the book in his conclusion. Then, he contradicts himself in Appendix A, *An Exhortation To Unity*, when he states, “The application of the regulative principle to this area of worship is of great importance, but the use of a single instrument to accompany singing should not be seen as a violation of such gravity that it should disrupt the peace or the unity of any church” (p. 234). Price fails to follow the regulative principle which is an objective principle taught in Scripture and falls prey to subjectivism in giving his own opinion of its application. Price places unity above adherence to the regulative principle in Scripture. In reality, unity can only be achieved by adhering to this principle.

In Appendix B, Price discusses eight guidelines for initiating reform in the music of the church. He desires to achieve a smooth transition from the use of musical instruments in worship to their non-use. This involves the development of singing in the congregation. Not once, does Price consider the use of musical instruments to be sinful, yet the thrust of the book is to argue against them as a violation of the regulative principle in worship.

Prince closes his book with Appendix C where he gives a reprint of an article written by Charles Spurgeon concerning how to sing.

The index of names and extended bibliography are very useful. The bibliography can be an effective tool to continue research in this area.