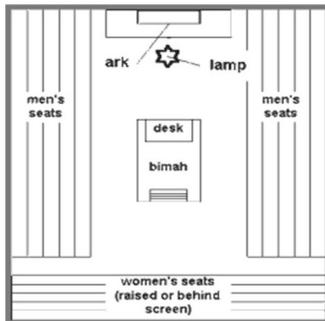


CHURCH HISTORY

“Now these things took place as examples for us...”

Jewish Synagogue



The basic layout of a first century synagogue will be reflected in church buildings built two centuries later when they first begin to appear. The influence of Jewish tradition was strong in the early church, as evidenced by the Judaizing problem in the New Testament

Appendix II - History of Church Music, Pt. 1

Discussions of music in worship by churches of Christ usually center on one aspect - instrumental music. That discussion is certainly important and relevant. However, the history of the development of both vocal and instrumental music, the reasons for changes, and the role each played, teach us so much more about the how's and why's of what we do today including origins of types of vocal music and where our chosen styles originated. Changing emphases on types of vocal music show cyclical patterns through history. The place of music in worship has changed significantly throughout the centuries.

We will examine the topic chronologically, taking time to learn lessons from the past that should help us. I hope you will find it valuable and helpful study. Remember I am writing mainly from an historical context, giving a record of practices. I will not be pronouncing judgements after every paragraph. But we will make relevant applications as we travel through two millennia of church music.

Music in First Century Judaism

The first century church begins in the context of the Jewish community. Jews have included music in their worship as the Old Testament documents. Most of this music consisted of the singing of Psalms and like songs as chants. Types of Psalms include: praise, penitence, pleas for help, condemnation of enemies, exhortations to brethren, and other topics.

In the beginning, Temple worship was the center of all worship. Both vocal and instrumental music were included. With the dispersion of the Jews, synagogue worship followed. It was the center Jewish worship. Even Jerusalem was full of synagogues (As many as three synagogues may be referenced in Acts 6:9) The style of synagogue worship did not involve sacrifices, but included reading of and commenting on the law, prayer, and the chanting of songs, mostly psalms. There is no evidence of instrumental music in synagogue worship. That was practiced at the temple.

Odes to Solomon



This manuscript fragment is from the earliest surviving collection of songs for Christian worship. Its name may come from copies that also included Psalms from the Old Testament. We have copies that include almost all the songs. Only Odes 2 & 3 are missing.

This background would have some influence on the type of music found in an almost exclusively Jewish first century church. With this context, let's start by examining the biblical basis for New Testament worship.

The New Testament on Music in Worship

We do not have a complete worship assembly recorded in the New Testament. Much of what we learn is from the inspired writer's correction of abuses. Vocal music is clearly found in the New Testament. 1st Corinthians 14 finds Paul correcting abuses of the public worship, especially the use of spiritual gifts. Singing and hymns are mentioned in the discussion (14:15, 26). Types of songs are even specified in the New Testament. These include psalms, hymns, spiritual songs and songs of thanksgiving (Eph. 5:19, 20; Col. 3:16). Exhortations to sing are found (Heb. 2:12; James 5:13). However, there is no mention of instruments of music in their worship. Historians are in agreement there was an absence in any form of instrumental music - a general practice that would continue for almost a millennium.

Justin Martyr's early 2nd century description of a Lord's Day worship indicates almost no change from the revealed pattern we find in our Bibles. Some historians suggest little is written about Sunday worship by Justin's time because there was probably little disagreement on what was practiced. It is interesting that Justin does not include singing in his description of the worship. That does not preclude its use in his time as we have other references to psalms in their gatherings. Ignatius (108-140 est.) speaks of songs and even quotes prose that may have been sung. Tertullian (155-240 est.) refers to psalms as a part of worship. Other references to singing are found as well as examples of songs. Scholars now believe there are examples of such hymns in the New Testament text (ex. 1st Timothy 3:16). The theme of a number of these hymns are centered on praising Jesus in addition to God the Father. It is also believed by scholars most of these songs were still chanted, like the Psalms in Hebrew synagogue worship, often in "responsive" form with the congregation responding to the leader's chanting of the song.

The earliest surviving "song book" is from the late 1st - early 2nd century. Entitled The Odes of Solomon, it contains forty-two songs. (No one really understands the reason behind the title.) The first copy of a song containing any form of musical notation is from the 3rd century. It is the only one of its kind from the early centuries of the church. The notation does not indicate melody as much as pace. Again, evidence indicates these early songs were almost certainly sung responsively - the leader chanting the lines with the congregation participating by chanting the lines after him. (Early Christians Speak; E. Ferguson; p. 156). In early Christian worship the obvious emphasis was upon the words, not the music. Since the tempo

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Absence of Instruments in the Early Church

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References to singing in worship are plentiful in records of early Christian writers. No instrumental music is found. In fact, early apostolic fathers condemned use of instruments in *all* contexts of life, not just worship. They identified them with pagan revelries as well as pagan worship.

Statements near 400 AD declare the continued absence of musical instruments in Christian worship. Theodoret, bishop of Cyrrhus in Syria wrote:

"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." (*Questions and Answers for the Orthodox* by Theodoret)

varied it would have been almost impossible for an instrument to accompany them. It offers an additional explanation why none of these early church writers refer to the use of instrumental music in worship.

Early Christian writers were unanimous in their opposition to musical instruments in worship and, often, in the world in general. They associated them with the immorality and idolatry of pagan worship and their use in the pagan world in general. They viewed Old Testament uses of instruments either as allegorical references or as a practice of the Mosaic dispensation that had been replaced by the Christian dispensation. Their polemics confirm musical instruments were no part of the earliest church worship assemblies and, almost certainly, in the singing of hymns at any time, in or out of the assemblies.

New Testament worship music was vocal and simple. For centuries the songs were just chants.. The words were what mattered. It is a great lesson for us to remember today. If our affinity to a song is first because of the melody, we may need to rethink our song preferences. Music is powerful, and God included it for a purpose. But He never intended it to be the focus of the songs. The best melodies so complement the words you cannot help but be focused on the message. If the musical arrangement hinders the understanding of the message it has the wrong emphasis.

Constantine and the Fourth Century Church

When Emperor Constantine became a Christian (312 AD), changes are seen in almost every aspect of the church. That is certainly true concerning the role of music in worship. As mentioned in our first two lessons, the huge number of "conversions" swelled the size of Sunday assemblies. Congregational participation decreased and emphasis was placed upon the leaders in the worship - mainly the priest or bishop - who performed almost all parts of the service as everyone watched. Length of services also increased. More prayers, longer communion, and more chants. Some of these chants included the congregation as they were responsive or antiphonal (repeating a line chanted by the cantor or responding with a similar line). But congregational singing/chanting was reduced. However, it is still without instrumental accompaniment.

Singing during the communion can be traced back to the fourth century. At that time, Psalm 34 (33 in the Latin Bible of the Middle Ages) was the customary, if not invariable, choice as a communion chant, primarily because of the appropriateness of its 8th verse "taste and see that the Lord is good." Gradually, other psalms were introduced, sung with an antiphon related to the liturgical observance of the day. The number of psalm verses sung depended on the number of communicants. With the sharp decline in the receptions of communion that took place in the

The Gregorian Chant

Gregorian Chant - "Church music sung as a single vocal line in free rhythm and a restricted scale (plainsong), in a style developed for the medieval Latin liturgy."

The characteristic of the Gregorian chant made singing in unity difficult. No established rhythm or notes, plus being sung in Latin, excluded congregational singing. Most of the congregants were illiterate, thus unskilled in chants.

In later developments notations of were added that indicated pitch and duration within each *syllable*, but not pitches of individual *notes*, nor the relative starting pitches of each group of notes that were sung with a single syllable.

Listen to this example of later Medieval chants where harmony has been introduced. But it is not indicative of the more primitive early chants which were either sung solo or, later, in unison by the monks.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kK5AohCMX0U>

Middle Ages, the singing of the psalm verses ceased to have any function and they were largely abandoned by the early 11th century.

All the music of these centuries is dominated by the church. Secular music takes a back seat to compositions produced for worship. The greatest composers will write primarily for the church for centuries to come..

The Middle Ages

Vocal church music from the 6th century forward is given more structure. Instead of wandering tempos and random note changes, the chants are more organized. They evolve into what is called the Gregorian Chant. Pope Gregory I (590-604) is credited with codifying the chants into a standard form resulting in uniform usage throughout the western church. His work influences church music for most of the Middle Ages.

In the 9th century more complicated forms of chants were developed. Songs might include two different, complementary melodic lines at the same time. These melodic forms became more and more intricate. This continued into the 14th century with the further development of polyphonic music - a much more complicated form involving a number of independent melodic lines tied together by an overarching harmonic framework. Such complicated music was beyond the ability of a mostly illiterate congregation and their participation was reduced to simple standard responses interspersed between verses. Thus, the use of choirs became much more prominent with the increased complexity of the music. Antiphonal singing reaches its full development by the Renaissance. This form, in which essentially one choir answers the other with a related phrase, became extremely popular. Many cathedrals have dual choir stalls facing each other accommodating two or more choirs, reflecting the practice of antiphonal songs.

Many early Christian hymns were written in the style of the Psalms but the styles evolved. Song themes were based upon verses in scripture or on biblical topics or themes. Hymns are dominated by praise of Jesus as the Son and Savior and thanksgiving for His sacrifice. The church "song book" became quite voluminous and varies from region to region. By the Renaissance, church music is the work of the finest composers, sung by highly trained choirs and cantors. Congregants mainly just listen and do not participate. (Observation: How much of an obligation do we have to sing songs that all can sing? Not all are skilled in music or have vocal training. Some are new converts.)

Instrumental Music in the Renaissance

The absence of musical instruments in worship for the first millennium is generally accepted by historians. The rare appearance of a couple of organs in the Middle Ages will be quite

The Pipe Organ



Above is the pipe organ in Notre Dame cathedral (1573) which survived the recent fire. The facade is original though the working parts have been updated and replaced through the centuries.

Below is a link to a video of "Three Centuries of Music" - the first songs played going back to the early 1700's. It should not be hard to understand why congregational singing was difficult with such overpowering sound.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ldgsWt6fzI>

controversial. The first instrument (and only one for centuries) is the pipe organ.

There is some evidence the first organ in church worship was introduced by Pope Vitalian (657-672). Organs that had been sent to Pepin in 757 and Charlemagne in 812 were considered oddities creating a "reaction of mingled curiosity and awe." Apparently these organs were not used in church worship. Organs begin to be introduced into the church from 1000 to 1300 and only gradually became widely used. As organs appeared, most were found in the great cathedrals of Europe. Many required dozens of people to operate. (The organ installed in England's Winchester Cathedral in 951 required 70 men to maintain the air supply and two organists to play.) It should be noted instrumental music was not accepted by the Eastern Orthodox church which separated from the Roman church in about 1070. It continues to be rejected by most Greek Orthodox to this day. During the Renaissance in France, as in Italy, Spain and Portugal, organs were primarily designed to play alternating verses rather than accompany congregational singing. The loud, overpowering pipe organ was just not a suitable instrument for accompanying vocal music. It would have been difficult to use them before 1000 as accompaniment because early organs were difficult to keep in tune, making additional musical or vocal accompaniment problematic. A millennium of acapella music in the church was not easily overcome. (In fact, the term *acapella* means "as done in the church" or "in the church way" - vocal music without accompaniment.) But as the Renaissance culture introduced a more humanistic and worldly culture, church music incorporates what is happening in the secular world into both vocal and instrumental music. Though the music is beautiful, it is intricate, complicated, usually sung in Latin, and without congregational participation.

End of Part One