

Does Music Technology Belong In The Church? A Brief Reminder...

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So, you're fighting the advent of technology in church music are you? Can't stand the idea of using unholy electric guitars or, worse yet, computer loops in the musical praises of the Lord? All I can say is I'm glad you weren't in control a few hundred years ago!

Let me start by reminding you that there is nothing in this world that exists without God having put it here first. The electric current that powers my synthesizer, the electronic algorithms and configurations that create the weird little sounds it makes and the science that allows a paper cone to act as a speaker all function because God created this world the way He did. Science, after all, is merely man's discovery of the incredible marvels of His creation! God also ordained the experimental personalities and creative abilities of those who advance music technology.

God has always welcomed technological advances, and, in fact, scripture invites the use of them in our worship. Look at Psalm 33:2: "*Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.*" Nowhere in the Genesis account of creation do we read of God's creation of musical instruments such as the lyre. This means it is fair to assume that at one point in history, this instrument had to be invented by man, using the science of the day. Attaching a string at a certain tautness to some kind of reverberating body and plucking it to create a musical tone involved a lot of scientific experimentation and at the time was a huge technological achievement. In fact, the first known lyres used only three to seven strings, so by specifying the ten-string lyre we have a direct request for the result of technological progress. God was obviously pleased with the result because He wanted us to use it for His glory!

If your idea of church music that pleases God requires, for example, a traditional organ, keep in mind that, while there is nothing wrong with organ music, people in the early church would consider the sound of the pipe organ to be completely foreign to their ears. It's even possible that the apostle Paul might cover his ears and run at the sound of Bach!

It required centuries of technological advances to achieve the sound of what we consider to be a very traditional (and some would say 'dated') organ sound. A brief look at the history of the organ would show that the organ we know today is itself the result of technology. The organ was actually first created by the Romans. Built in ceramic and clay, they produced sound by using the weight of water to pump air through a hole. This early technology was lost for centuries (discovered later through archaeology), and the organ was later *reinvented* in the middle ages using entirely different technological advances. The organs at this time produced only one or two notes (think instrumental versions of Gregorian chants). It then required much more science and technology to get

to the organs that Bach used in his writing, and this is the sound many still associate with "proper" church music.

[In his book, *The Purpose Driven Church*, Rick Warren discusses the dangers of revering one form of music as being the only music that should be used in church. He writes: "To insist that all 'good' music was written in Europe two hundred years ago is cultural elitism. There certainly isn't any biblical basis for that view. ...no particular *style* of music is 'sacred'. What makes a song sacred is its *message*. ...To insist that one particular style of music is sacred is idolatry." Strong words, yes, but accurate.]

These days, when we read in Scripture about harps, trumpets and cymbals, the image we have of these instruments today is vastly different than the actual instruments of those days. The first harps would have had only a few strings and would be tuned to one scale. Technology allowed the invention of pedals so we could have modern harps that have the full chromatic range of a piano. Trumpets, even as recently as Mozart's day, did not have valves. Biblical trumpets could have been anything from conch shells to single-tubed instruments, and they were most likely not made of brass. At best, their range might have been like that of a bugle – only able to produce a set series of notes. In the early 1960's a rediscovery and analysis of baroque era trumpets showed that as technology advanced, a series of precise pinholes could be used to produce multiple chromatic tones. It was only in the last few centuries that the invention of valves wiped out all earlier versions. Cymbals in biblical times were at best merely small gongs (used primarily by dancing girls), not the shiny, bright and loud cymbals we see today (which actually come from the Moslems.) It was technology and musical exploration that gave us the versions of these instruments we have today.

All our instruments today in some way come from these early instruments (the guitar, for example, comes from an early Greek instrument called the 'kithara'.) Our modern versions of these instruments are simply the latest results of the technological experimentation that has gone on since their original invention. And, chances are, they will continue to change. Even most organs these days are built with some sort of digital technology!

It is simply a matter of taste, not spirituality, when we decide whether or not to use modern technology in our worship. There is nothing inherently wrong or evil with an electric guitar, but it is fair that some people may not enjoy the sound of it. Modern sounds, such as loops, may give new life to that old hymn your church has been doing for years. A drum machine is simply a new way to make the sounds prescribed in Psalm 150:5 where it asks us to "*praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals.*"

Someday, even the most current computer generated hip-hop praise songs will sound dated (imagine the 70 year old preacher in a few decades pining away for the gentler days of rap music!) God does not care where the sound comes from – ancient lyres or modern computers. His concern is what those sounds mean to us (are they our

offering of praise to Him?) and whether or not we're using every tool at our disposal to reach the lost.

So, don't be afraid to plug it in and rock on!