

What Did Early Christians Believe About Using Instrumental Music In Worship?

CHRYSOSTOM “David formerly sang songs, also today we sing hymns. He had a lyre with lifeless strings, the church has a lyre with living strings. Our tongues are the strings of the lyre with a different tone indeed but much more in accordance with piety. Here there is no need for the *cithara*, or for stretched strings, or for the *plectrum*, or for art, or for any instrument; but if you like, you may yourself may become a *cithara*, mortifying the members of the flesh and making a full harmony of mind and body. For when the flesh no longer lusts against the Spirit, but has submitted to it’s orders and has been led at length into the best and most admirable path, then you will create a spiritual melody.” (Chrysostom, 347-407, Exposition of Psalms 41, (381-398 A.D.) Source Readings in Music History, ed. O. Strunk, W. W. Norton and Co.: New York, 1950, pg. 70.)

CLEMENT “Leave the pipe to the shepherd, the flute to the men who are in fear of gods and intent on their idol worshiping. Such musical instruments must be excluded from our wingless feasts, for they are more suited for beasts and for the class of men that is least capable reason than for men. The Spirit, to purify the divine liturgy from any such unrestrained revelry chants: ‘Praise Him with sound of trumpet,’ for, in fact, at the sound of the trumpet the dead will rise again; ‘praise Him with harp,’ for the tongue is the harp of the Lord; ‘and with the lute, praise Him,’ understanding the mouth as a lute moved by the Spirit as the lute is by the *plectrum*; ‘praise Him with timbal and choir,’ that is, the Church awaiting the resurrection of the body in the flesh which is it’s echo; ‘praise Him with strings and organ,’ calling our bodies an organ and its sinews strings, for from them the body derives its coordinated movement, and when touched by the Spirit, gives forth human sounds; ‘praise Him on high-sounding cymbals,’ which mean the tongue of the mouth which with the movement of the lips, produces words. Then to all mankind He calls out, ‘Let every spirit praise the Lord,’ because He rules over every spirit He has made. In reality, man is an instrument for peace, but these other things, if anyone concerns himself overmuch with them, become instruments of conflict or inflame the passions. The Etruscans, for example, use the trumpet for war; the Arcadians, the horn; the Sicels, the flute, the Cretans, the lyre; the Lacedonians, the pipe; the Thracians, the bugle; the Egyptians, the drum; and the Arabs, the cymbal. But as for us, we make use of one instrument alone: Only the Word of peace by whom we are a homage to God, no longer with ancient harp or trumpet or drum or flute, which those trained for war employ.” (Clement of Alexandria, 190A.D. The Instructor, Fathers of the Church, p.130)