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## **ORGANS IN ORTHODOX WORSHIP: DEBATE AND IDENTITY**

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Although instrumental worship is an issue that seems to have received intense treatment by certain patristic writers, the assumption of organs in Orthodox churches in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has raised supercilious glances and charges of modernism, but in no case has the use of organ music been flatly and effectively condemned by any Church authority.<sup>1</sup>

Yet the debate continues. Although George Anastasiou claimed in the 1960 edition of his *Armonikē Leitourgikē Ymnōdia* that he introduced organ usage into Greek Orthodox practice in America in 1921,<sup>2</sup> Matthew Namee notes that references to the use of organs in Greek churches date to 1895.<sup>3</sup> During the twentieth century, in other words, the use of organs in Greek Orthodox churches spread throughout America; though no figures are available counting or estimating how many Greek Orthodox parishes in America have organs (many sources merely say “most parishes”), the number is significant enough to spur debate over the issue. For example, the 1987 minisymposium of the National Forum of Greek Orthodox Church Musicians asked the question: “The Use of the Organ: Can we reconcile Tradition with emerging American Practices?”<sup>4</sup> Such a question has been raised by “traditionalists” such as Constantine Cavarnos, who writes that “[a]nother lamentable innovation [in Orthodoxy] is the introduction of the organ. The introduction of the organ ... constitutes an innovation which the Holy Fathers explicitly prohibited and which is contrary to the ordinances of the first Christians.”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, this debate is arising freshly with new investment in older chant forms. Alexander Lingas notes that older styles of monodic chant with ison (drone) are being revitalized, primarily by singers and scholars attempting to discern and throw off the western hegemony of music.<sup>6</sup>

1 See James William McKinnon, “The Church Fathers and Musical Instruments,” (Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1965).

2 George Anastasiou, *Armonikē Leitourgikē Ymnōdia* (self-published, 1960 [1987]), 326.

3 Matthew Namee, “Organs in Greek Orthodox Churches,” orthodoxhistory.org blog, <http://orthodoxhistory.org/2009/12/23/organs-in-greek-orthodox-churches/>, 23 December 2009 (26 February 2013).

4 Cf. James Steve Counelis, “The Organ and the Orthodox Church: Some Contemporary Reflections,” in *Inheritance and Change in Orthodox Christianity* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 1995), 116–122, at 116.

5 Constantine Cavarnos, *Orthodox Tradition and Modernism*, trans. Patrick G. Barber, *Monographic Supplement Series V* (Etna: Center of Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1992), 23–24.

6 Alexander Lingas, “Tradition and Renewal in Greek Orthodox Psalmody,” in *The Psalms in Community: Jewish and Christian Textual, Liturgical, and Artistic Traditions*, ed. Harold W. Attridge and Margot E. Fassler (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 341–356.

Any attempt, however, to argue for or against the propriety of organs and instrumental music in Orthodox churches raises a number of questions about Orthodox identity. First and foremost is the question of dispute within Orthodoxy: how do disputes arise, and how are they settled? The writings of the New Testament display a nascent preoccupation with doctrinal purity, a theme taken up by almost all Christian writers in the period after the New Testament writings; Eusebius is perhaps most famous for his depiction of a Church victoriously asserting itself over the machinations of heretics. Although this model has been called into question, notably by Walter Bauer,<sup>7</sup> and has been developed by Elaine Pagels<sup>8</sup> and Bart Ehrman,<sup>9</sup> the question of purity remains paramount for Orthodox Christians. Debate, thus, appears to be embedded within the very title “Orthodox,” assuming that those not in agreement are “un-Orthodox.” The very existence of a debate over organ use in Greek Orthodox parishes displays a struggle for purity, a major facet of Orthodox identity.

Furthermore, the debate over the use of organs raises another point: what sources are held as valid as solutions to problems such as instrumental music in worship? The patristic *ressourcement* of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has embedded in many Orthodox the validity of an *ad fontes* approach,<sup>10</sup> but this seems in some ways problematic. For example, what do we do about patristic writers who were ignored or forgotten within the Greek Christian tradition, but have now enjoyed a resurgence in popularity? The homily *Peri Pascha* by Melito of Sardis, for example, was recently (re-) discovered and published in 1940;<sup>11</sup> similarly, Irenaeus’s *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* was only recently uncovered in an Armenian translation, and published in 1907.<sup>12</sup> Even more problematic, the current designation of Apostolic Fathers is a title contrived in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to describe those Patristic writers viewed as orthodox from a later vantage point.<sup>13</sup> Even though published collections of “The Apostolic Fathers” are popular today,<sup>14</sup> from a textual point of view little separates the circulation of Ignatius, Polycarp, and Hermas, for example, from other 2<sup>nd</sup> century writers who have not stood the orthodox test of time, such as Theodotus of Byzantium. Beyond the question of “who is a Father,” a thornier issue of interpretation and identity arises: how does one appeal to a patristic writer and text? In many disputes within Orthodoxy today, patristic writings are invoked to defend everything from the Old Calendar<sup>15</sup> to abortion.<sup>16</sup> As I will show, in the debates about instrumental music in

7 Especially Walter Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1964 [1934]); translated as *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, trans. Gerhard Krodel and Robert A. Kraft (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

8 Especially Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979).

9 Especially Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battle for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

10 See Brian Daley, “The nouvelle théologie and the patristic revival: sources, symbols and the science of theology,” in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7 no. 4 (2005):362–382; Joseph Carola, “Pre-conciliar Patristic revival,” in *Augustinian Studies* 38 no. 2 (2007):381–405; and Andrew Louth, “The patristic revival and its protagonists,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, ed. Mary Cunningham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 188–202.

11 See entry “Melito, St,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F.L. Cross (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 882; and Henry M. Knapp, “Melito’s use of Scripture in *Peri Pascha*: Second-Century Typology,” in *Vigiliae Christianae* 54, no. 4 (2000):343–374.

12 “St Irenaeus,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 702.

13 “Apostolic Fathers, The” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 74.

14 For example, see *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Jack N. Sparks (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978).

15 Bishop Photii of Triaditz, “The Patristic Church Calendar,” Orthodox Christian Information Center, [http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/photii\\_cal.aspx](http://orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism/photii_cal.aspx) (10 May 2013).

16 “Abortion and Catholic Thought: The Little-Told History,” reposted on “Sanctuary for All Faiths”, <http://sanctuaryforallfaiths.yuku.com/topic/2170/Abortion-and-Catholic-Thought-The-LittleTold-History#>.

Orthodox worship, both sides appeal to patristic writings, or at least have to reckon with the patristic writings on music and instruments.

But most fundamentally, the debates about instrumental music in Orthodox worship struggle with the question of diversity within orthodoxy. That the printing press effected an epistemological change in early modern Europe is well-documented and argued,<sup>17</sup> and the documents and texts of the pre-modern Christians display a different orientation towards diversity and knowledge. The “historical” content of the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ life have been a stumbling block for understanding Jesus’ person since the earliest Christian writers, but the Church has left this problem standing. John Behr points out,

So some today attempt to retrieve the original, pristine and pure, meaning of the authors of scripture by removing the obscuring sediment of later theological reflection. But to claim, on the basis of the New Testament, that something is what the apostle Paul, for instance, ‘really meant,’ is to forget that the very basis for that claim—the New Testament itself—is already the result of other, theological, factors; there were many claimants to Paul before there was a New Testament, and the portrait it sketches of the apostle was only one of many.<sup>18</sup>

Such an insecure relationship between text, history, and knowledge is not natural to the modern and postmodern mind, but does not seem to pose a problem when examining the earliest Christian writings. Similarly, the manuscripts of the New Testament display a striking array of textual diversity in their contents.<sup>19</sup> Recent scholarship has questioned the standard model of an “original text” of the New Testament with variations, leaving us grappling with how early Christian writers balanced such diversity between manuscripts, canons, and textual choices with a striving for orthodoxy.<sup>20</sup> A careful balance between orthodoxy and diversity—a balance which often seems contrary or even paradoxical to modern eyes—defines much of the Orthodox inheritance from the Greek tradition.<sup>21</sup>

An in-depth and systematic examination of these three related identity questions of dispute, validation, and diversity deserves its own monographic treatment, and is beyond the limited scope of this paper. But using the sample case of instrumental music within Orthodox worship, I will investigate how these three categories relating to identity factor into this contemporary debate. Debate and validation are fairly obvious in this particular question, as they are in many debates within Orthodoxy; the main sources of tension and debate appear to arise from living a “pre-modern faith in a postmodern era,” as Behr has put it.<sup>22</sup> Beyond patristic sources, the appellees of “Tradition” include, but are not limited to, Scripture, canon law,

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UYx2ObXvs0J (10 May 2013).

17 See especially Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

18 John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death* (Crestwood: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2006), 47.

19 See Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964). Metzger lays out the argument for the now-common claim, begun in the 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-centuries, that the goal of New Testament textual criticism is to arrive at “the original text” of the New Testament. Also see Ehrman’s revision: Bart Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

20 See Jerome J. McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Eldon Jay Epp, “The Multivalence of the Term ‘Original Text’ in New Testament Textual Criticism,” in *Harvard Theological Review* 92 no.3 (1999):245–281. Cf. David Wagschal, “The Nature of Law and Legality in the Byzantine Canonical Collections 381–883,” (Ph.D. thesis, Durham University, 2010) 26–27.

21 I acknowledge that I endorse the normativity of patristic appeal by arguing that the Greek patristic writers had a different approach to diversity and orthodoxy than that to which modern believers are accustomed.

22 Behr, 173.

liturgy, and spiritual common (or sometimes uncommon) sense. But the category and acceptance of diversity seems missing in many debates, including the debate at hand over instrumental music. Following an analysis of the arguments for and against instrumental music in Orthodox liturgical worship, I will investigate the question over the place and utility of diversity within the debate. Ultimately, the question of identity is primary to this investigation. Identification seeks to articulate the *sine qua non* of a particular entity (or perhaps non-entity). While the Orthodox self-identified combination of right belief, right hierarchy, and right worship is not in question in this paper, I examine the place of diversity within Orthodox identity.

### THE ARGUMENTS IN FAVOUR OF INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Frank Desby notes that “[n]o one knows, for sure, where and when the first choir was formed in America’s Greek churches, or when organ accompaniment was introduced, but many have laid claim to being the originators.”<sup>23</sup> The testimony given above by Matthew Namee agrees: looking at the early example of New Orleans, and later Washington, D.C., the development and spread of organs within the churches of the Greek diaspora in North America is difficult to trace. But despite an uncertain legacy, electric and pipe organs are a frequent feature of American Greek Orthodox parishes. One of the most common reasons given for this presence, though not necessarily an argument for organ use, is that Greek Americans brought in organs along with pews in order to become more “American.” Namee discounts a popular theory that organs and pews were in Protestant and Catholic church buildings when Greek Orthodox Christians bought them to convert them to Orthodox worship space; he provides records and references to several examples of Greek parishes which purchased their own organs and pews.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, George Anastasiou, who claims to have introduced organs into American Greek Orthodox worship, does not offer an apologia of “Americanization.” In fact the first (1945) edition of his book *Armonikē Leitourgikē Ymnōdia* features introductory material entirely in Greek.<sup>25</sup> Anastasiou’s argument for the organ’s place in Greek worship is not strictly limited to an American context, although that seems to be his ultimate goal. He recounts the invention of the organ by an Alexandrian Greek musician-mathematician in 145 B.C., and its subsequent adoption by Athanasius, Basil of Caesarea, and use in the narthex of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. The use of organ in Greek churches is actually a re-introduction of an originally Hellenic instrument in Anastasiou’s argument:

In the year A.D. 822 Constantine the Small, Emperor at that time of Byzantium, donated the first organ to Charlemagne in the West, and from that time the Western civilization, having taken it from the Eastern civilization, worked it over and perfect it and brought it to the degree of perfection which it is found today, to be played electrically and to be heard megaphonically, etc.<sup>26</sup> [sic]

Anastasiou concludes that “the organ of Greek invention became the valuable leader and coadjutor of our choirs and in America for the elevation of the Divine Worship

23 Frank Desby, “Growth of Liturgical Music in the Iakovian Era,” in *History of the Greek Orthodox Church in America*, ed. Rev. Miltiades B. Efthimiou and George A. Christopoulos (New York: Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of north and South America, 1984), 305–323, at 305.

24 Matthew Namee, “Pews (or lack thereof) in early Orthodox churches,” orthodoxhistory.org blog, <http://orthodoxhistory.org/2009/12/09/pews-or-lack-thereof-in-early-orthodox-churches/>, 9 December 2009 (10 May 2013).

25 *Armonikē Leitourgikē Ymnōdia: Greek-Byzantine Liturgical Hymnal*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: self-published, 1945), 13–17.

26 Anastasiou, *Armonikē Leitourgikē Ymnōdia* (1960), 326.

for our reunion through our choirs (which, I am convinced, I first introduced in America), with the ancient Greek Byzantine greatness of our Church."<sup>27</sup>

By the time of the 1987 mini-symposium of the National Forum of Greek Orthodox Church Musicians referred to above, the place of the organ within Greek Orthodox worship had solidified. Counelis's paper sets forth a rigorous defence of the use of the organ. Responding to the frequent arguments against instrumental use, Counelis begins from the Great Commission, which "prescribes that everyone in the Church has the duty to baptize the nations of the world in the name of the Trinity .... Without doubt, poetic prayers, hymns, music, and musical instruments are fit vehicles for bringing the 'Good News' of the Risen Christ to all."<sup>28</sup> Though some of the Church Fathers wrote against the use of instruments during worship, their position arose because of their social milieu, not because of a dogmatic opposition to instrumental music as such.<sup>29</sup> Because the patristic social condition has passed, the proscription of the patristic writers "is not applicable to the Holy American Church today. This is so because the liturgical use of the organ fulfils Clement [of Alexandria]'s liturgical concerns for prayerfully appropriate words and music presented reverently in intent performance."<sup>30</sup> Not only is the Greek American use of organs acceptable; it is a "contribution to the grand tradition of church music for the whole of the Orthodox Church." Counelis appeals to Timothy [Metropolitan Kallistos] Ware's concept of "creative fidelity" to the past in order to justify a stepping away from "parrot-like" tradition toward an authentic re-appropriation of the mind of tradition.<sup>31</sup>

Because the organ is no longer used in lascivious theatre or orgiastic ritual, it is freed from the bindings certain patristic writers placed on it. Furthermore, there is no dogma prohibiting or advocating any norm with regard to worship.<sup>32</sup> Counelis draws a parallel with the state of iconography: just as the style of iconography has not been dogmatized, the style of music has not been and cannot be dogmatized.<sup>33</sup> Liturgical change is a frequent occurrence throughout Orthodox history; one liturgical expression has never been dogmatized, and a Typikon has never been held as universally normative.<sup>34</sup> Likewise there are no canons within the corpus of the canonical tradition regulating or barring the use of instruments in worship. There are five canons in the entire corpus notable for regulating singing: Laodicea 15 and 59, and Trullo 66, 75, and 81. The absence of a definite ruling on musical instruments in the canonical literature of the Orthodox Church points to the fundamentally economic nature of canon law: its function is to effect the salvation of believers, not to regulate mistakes and sins within the fold of the church. As Trullo 102 states, sometimes this salvation is worked out through strict adherence to the canons, and other times, it is worked out through loosening of the canonical statute.

Though somewhat controversial, the organ's place within Greek Orthodox worship has gradually solidified over the last century. The use of the organ is not necessarily an effort to become more American, as shown by George Anastasiou's

27 Ibid., 326.

28 Counelis, 119.

29 Ibid., 118.

30 Ibid., 120.

31 Ibid., 119.

32 Ibid., 118.

33 Ibid.

34 Cf. Thomas Pott, *Byzantine Liturgical Reform: A Study of Liturgical Change in the Byzantine Tradition* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2010).

reasoning; nor are its advocates ignorant of the depth of Orthodox tradition and the writings of certain Church fathers against the use of instrumental worship. Perhaps of necessity, advocates for organ use in Greek churches claim a creative fidelity to Orthodox tradition, a fidelity which defines Greek Orthodox self-presentation: not slavishly bound to the past, but free to interpret and use it in order to bring about a more fundamental goal.

### THE ARGUMENTS AGAINST ORGAN USE IN WORSHIP

The arguments against the use of organs in worship frequently appeal to concepts of tradition, as known through the writings of the early Christian Fathers. These kinds of arguments are frequently found in online forums for Orthodox Christians.<sup>35</sup> The online arguments often spring from a comment from someone who has converted or is converting to Orthodoxy, wanting to know more about the “ban” on instrumental music in worship. For example, in 2012 the OrthodoxChristianity.net forum received a post from user Android\_Rewster explaining his reservations concerning converting to Orthodoxy:

I struggle with these ideas:

- Forgiveness through confessions
- Prohibition of instruments in worship
- Sola Scriptura (this one less so)

Could some of you give me some encouragement in these aspects? Orthodoxy is an incredibly beautiful denomination, I just have to get around a few things before I can believe wholeheartedly in it.

Thanks.<sup>36</sup>

The responses were directed toward each point in typical apologetic fashion. The responses to the musical question follow the reasoning employed by many opponents of instrumental music. One responder wrote:

When I was first being instructed in the Orthodox faith I was taught that the reason we don't use instruments is because Christian worship is the continuation of the worship once conducted in the Holy Place. There only the human voice of the priests was permitted. The instruments used by the Hebrews were stationed in the outer court not within the Holy Place...and definitely not the Holy of Holies. Some saints and Fathers I've read have said they considered the allowance of instruments at all in pre Christian worship in the Temple/Tabernacle was a concession to human weakness, not an endorsement of their use.<sup>37</sup>

Taking up the idea of continuation of the Temple worship, this respondent concedes that though instrumental music was allowed in some pre-Christian Jewish worship, it was not the fullness of true worship effected by the worship of the Orthodox faith. In another message board on the same website, a similar conversation emerged. One user, the administrator of the entire forum, wrote that

35 The use and system of the online Orthodox presence deserves its own study, particularly focusing on Orthodox internet forums. Recent sociological research has focused on the sociology of internet usage; see Allison Cavanaugh, *Sociology in the age of the internet* (Maidenhead: McGraw Hill/Open University Press, 2007); and John A. Bargh and Katelyn Y.A. McKenna, “The Internet and Social Life,” in *Annual Review of Psychology* 55 (2004):573–590. Such a methodology could be used effectively to study Orthodox self-identity.

36 Android\_Rewster, “I'm a Reformed Protestant interested in converting to Orthodoxy,” OrthodoxChristianity.net, <http://www.orthodoxchristianity.net/forum/index.php/topic,48682.msg851245.html#msg851245> (10 May 2013).

37 Seraphim98, Reply #5 on “Re: I'm a Reformed Protestant interested in converting to Orthodoxy,” OrthodoxChristianity.net, <http://www.orthodoxchristianity.net/forum/index.php/topic,48682.msg852069.html#msg852069> (10 May 2013).

Psaltis aren't the only people who get that upset—try suggesting to an organist such as yourself that we get rid of organs and they flip out sometimes, too. I think that obviously we are going to have to phase out organs because they are simply not part of the greater Orthodox tradition, especially as the jurisdictions coalesce into one over the next two or three hundred years—other Orthodox Churches don't think very highly of organs and many non-Greek people I know going to Greek parishes for the first time are surprised by the organ. I know people like yourself who like the organ but they are a minority in my experience. Perhaps our "experience" is colored though by the people we speak with the most, and it really is the other way from what you or I are saying ....<sup>38</sup>

Organs are "not part of the greater Orthodox tradition," and are thus eliminated from true Orthodox worship. This historical argument, that organs have no place in historical Orthodox worship, and thus should not be introduced, is common on many online (and offline) arguments. One message board user, responding on the [www.monachos.net](http://www.monachos.net) forum in 2008, wrote that,

I agree with Olga. Musical instruments have no place in Orthodox services. There oughtn't to be pews either. How can one do a prostration in a pew? I don't know when pews started to be put in western churches but I'm sure that throughout the early centuries and the middle ages there were no pews. Mediaeval churches had ledges at the north and south walls where the weak and infirm would sit, hence the expression, 'the weakest to the wall'. Orthodoxy should not compromise its tradition just so as to pander to heterodox customs.<sup>39</sup>

Organs and pews are seen as compromises, diluting the purity of worship which Orthodox have inherited in their services. In fact, the line between purity of doctrine and purity of worship is frequently blurred when discussions of liturgical normativity and praxis are raised. One poster on [OrthodoxChristianity.net](http://OrthodoxChristianity.net) wrote

Unfortunately the church I go to has [an organ]. And a choir. Don't get me wrong, I love my church, the priests, and the people there, but I feel a little cheated when I hear people who only have chanters and are shocked when I say we have an organ. There was one time the choir was on vacation, and our chanter did all the singing. Not only did it seem shorter (not that that's important to me, but it was something noticeable) but it felt more "authentic." Then I went to another church in northeastern Virginia (St Katherine's, I believe) that only had chanters, and again it was a nice experience.

My priest has started pressing to make things more "Orthodox" so to speak in our services. They used to go down and meet people for communion, now they do it back near the altar as normal. I don't know if sometime in the future he may press to change our musical methods as well.<sup>40</sup>

Eliminating organs is thus not only a guarantee of authenticity, but also an attempt to "make things more 'Orthodox.'" Furthermore, any usage outside the norm of Byzantine orthodoxy is not Orthodox. One user wrote that "[t]he Fathers universally spoke against the use of musical instruments, musical instruments were avoided by the *whole* Church for 1900 years until someone went to a Catholic Mass and thought 'that looks cool, why don't we put one in our church too?'. Comparing it to kneeling at the Cherubic hymn is silly."<sup>41</sup> Not only are worship

38 Anastasios, Reply #116 on "Re: Organs in Greek Orthodox Churches," [OrthodoxChristianity.net](http://www.orthodoxchristianity.net/forum/index.php/topic,3224.msg70516.html#msg70516), <http://www.orthodoxchristianity.net/forum/index.php/topic,3224.msg70516.html#msg70516> (10 May 2013).

39 Andreas Moran, Post #22 in "Is Organ Music Forbidden?" [Monachos.net](http://www.monachos.net/conversation/topic/2775-is-organ-music-forbidden?p=52341) community board, <http://www.monachos.net/conversation/topic/2775-is-organ-music-forbidden?p=52341> (10 May 2013).

40 Dismas84, Reply #26 on "Re: musical instruments demonic" on [OrthodoxChristianity.net](http://www.orthodoxchristianity.net), <http://www.orthodoxchristianity.net/forum/index.php/topic,16160.msg231655.html#msg231655> (10 May 2013).

41 Orthodox11, reply #35 on "Re: musical instruments during the worship?" on [OrthodoxChristianity.net](http://www.orthodoxchristianity.net).

traditions that use instruments outside the Church, but the use of instruments is an innovation arising from a desire to make Orthodox liturgy like a Catholic Mass.

To these few examples many more can be added, mostly communicating the same basic arguments: *Orthodox* worship does not use instruments, because 1) such is the “traditional” mode of Orthodox worship, and/or 2) the Church Fathers wrote against the use of musical instruments in Church, and/or 3) God made the human voice, and the human voice is the only acceptable instrument for communicating worship. Though these online arguments are easily lambasted, the arguments put forth in academic works are not much different, though more robust.

Many treatises on music in the Orthodox Church attempt to tackle the problem of the lack of instrumental use in Orthodox worship. Johann von Gardner is representative of this trend:

Orthodox worship consists almost exclusively of verbal expression in its many forms: prayer, glorification, instruction, exegesis, homily, etc. Only the word is capable of expressing concrete, logically formulated ideas. Instrumental music, on the other hand, by its nature is incapable of such unambiguous expression; it can only express and evoke the emotional element, which is received subjectively by each individual listener, thus giving rise to a variety of interpretations.<sup>42</sup>

While his observation that only the word is capable of concrete, logically formulated ideas, he perhaps overlooks the importance of non-verbal communication within Orthodox worship, especially with iconography and liturgical movement. Worship in Orthodox churches is not composed entirely of concrete, logically formulated ideas; the essence of iconography is, in fact, that it is not concrete, that it responds to the viewer.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, Gardner’s fundamental argument reflects what many other Orthodox write about the absence of instruments: instruments cannot communicate the spoken or concrete word, and thus are unfit for liturgical worship. In an overview of the debate surrounding the related topic of mixed choirs, Byzantine chanters, and organ use, Ephraim Zachary Gresham notes that, opposed to choirs singing alongside organs, “Byzantine chant is chanted with the words of the hymns in mind, explicitly as a means to the transmission of dogma. Canon LXXV of the Sixth Ecumenical Synod describes the desired state of the chanter ....”<sup>44</sup> Accompanied choral music, by contrast, does not sing with the words of the hymn in mind.

Besides the theological reason for excluding instruments from worship, Hilka Seppälä provides an argument from the canonical literature. She explains that the lack of a canon prohibiting instrumental music does not mean it was allowed, but that “the absence of such a rule indicates the monopoly of singing. ... It seems that departing from the vocal practice did not even occur to early Christians. Consequently, there was no need for rules prohibiting the use of instruments.”<sup>45</sup>

net, <http://www.orthodoxchristianity.net/forum/index.php/topic,47381.msg817355.html#msg817355> (10 May 2013).

42 Johann von Gardner, *Russian Church Singing*, Volume I: Orthodox Worship and Hymnography, trans. Vladimir Morosan (Crestwood: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), 22.

43 Cf. Anna Kartsonis, “The Responding Icon,” in *Heaven on Earth*, ed. Linda Safran (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 58–80.

44 Gresham, Ephraim Zachary, “Byzantine Chanters, George Anastassiou, and the Electronic, Megaphonic Organ: The Polyphonic Organ-Choir in the Greek Orthodox Church in America,” in *Women in the Orthodox Church: Past Roles Future Paradigms*, Papers of the Sophia Institute Academic Conference, 4 December 2008, New York (New York: Theotokos Press, 2009), 144–157, at 148.

45 Hilka Seppälä, *The Song of Fire and Clay: Perspectives of Understanding Orthodox Church Singing*, trans. Maria Takala-Roszczenko (Joensuu: University of Joensuu/Open University, 2005), 11.



There are, in other words, a number of issues at play in the scholarly argument surrounding instrument use in liturgical worship. The first question asks what we can glean from past usage; the second asks how that gleaning affects modern understanding. A major portion of Orthodox identity, as noted above in the three categories of debate, is validation: does past usage validate or invalidate present usage?

The prohibition of the early Christian writers of instruments is mostly a given.<sup>46</sup> Many Orthodox writers appeal to these patristic texts as determining the present state of Orthodox liturgical worship.<sup>47</sup> St Basil accounts harp playing, dancing, and flute playing as “useless arts,” with the result of destruction.<sup>48</sup> For Chrysostom, dancing, cymbals, and flutes are numbered among the “Devil’s great heap of garbage.”<sup>49</sup> Besides the puritanical writings of Basil and Chrysostom, another school of Church fathers wrote about instruments only in terms of their spiritual allegory.<sup>50</sup> For example, Origen, commenting on Psalm 33:2, writes that “[t]he harp is the active soul; the psaltery is pure mind. The ten strings can be taken as ten nerves, for a nerve is a string. Therefore, the psaltery is taken to be a body having five sense and five faculties.”<sup>51</sup>

A further aspect of the strict use of voice in liturgy is that human song imitates the angelic song. Such an idea is found in patristic writings, but is based in the scriptural references of Isaiah 6 and the Revelation to St John; the iconological significance is taken up clearly during the liturgy through the Cherubic hymn, with the words “we who mystically represent (μυστικῶς εἰκονίζοντες) the Cherubim...” This iconology is taken very seriously by some Orthodox writers, extending to a reason for the prohibition on instruments. For instance, Benedict Sheehan writes,

One essential characteristic of angelic song that is evident in Scripture is that the music of the angels is exclusively vocal, that it is sung in some manner, usually with discernible words, and that it is thus a direct musical offering of the angels’ bodily and rational nature (according to the angelic sense of a “body”). The popular Western concept of angels accompanying their singing with harps and other instruments is unknown in Scripture and Orthodox tradition. This is important because, in exclusively singing the praises of God, the angels offer Him something essential to themselves rather than making an offering by way of a medium extrinsic to their nature. This is one key reason why Orthodox Christian liturgical tradition (including that of the West, until the Middle Ages) does not permit the use of musical instruments in the divine services.<sup>52</sup>

He provides further information in a footnote:

The angelic playing of ‘trumpets’ (*salpiggi*), though periodically mentioned in Scripture (Cf. Rev. 8), is not presented in connection with the angels’ worship of

46 For an overview of the conversation and scholarly debate, see Edward Foley, *Foundations of Christian Music: The Music of Pre-Constantinian Christianity*, American Essays in Liturgy, ed. Edward Foley (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 80–81.

47 The main texts can be found in *Music in early Christian literature*, ed. James McKinnon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); and James William McKinnon, “The Church Fathers.” Also, William Green, “Ancient Comment on Instrumental Music in the Psalms,” in *Restoration Quarterly* 1 no. 1 (1957), 3–8.

48 In from McKinnon, “The Church Fathers,” 182; in *Music in the Western World: A History in Documents*, ed. Piero Weiss and Richard Taruskin (New York: Schirmer Books, 1984), 27.

49 In Weiss and Taruskin, 28.

50 See Weiss and Taruskin, 28, and McKinnon, “The Church Fathers,” 179.

51 Weiss and Taruskin, 28.

52 Benedict Sheehan, “A ‘Small Entrance’ into Orthodox Christian Sacred Music: Part One – the Song of the Angels,” *Orthodox Arts Journal*, <http://www.orthodoxartsjournal.org/a-small-entrance-into-orthodox-christian-sacred-music-the-song-of-the-angels/> (9 May 2013).

God, but should rather be understood as an alarm directed at mankind and the rest of creation. Conversely, the Psalms that mention mankind (and not the angels) praising God with musical instruments are generally understood by the Church Fathers as possessing a spiritual rather than a literal meaning. It is well known among Judaic scholars that the use of musical instruments was proscribed from ancient Temple worship just as it is still forbidden in the Orthodox Church today.<sup>53</sup>

The usual elements of the Orthodox argument against instrumental music in worship are here: patristic appeal, defence of the voice as the only valid instrument for worship, a general understanding of tradition with which we cannot break, and an acknowledgment of the iconological nature of worship.

The self-presentation of Orthodox shows that the issue of instrumental music is important for identity. As shown by the internet forum posts quoted above, there is a conflation between Orthodox doctrine and Orthodox worship, and to what degree variances are allowed. Furthermore, some Orthodox writers seem to hold in high regard the lack of instrumental music as imbuing Orthodox liturgical life with a “mystical quality.” For example, Frederica Mathewes-Green, in her list of “12 Things I Wish I’d Known...” before visiting an Orthodox Church for the first time, writes that “[t]raditionally, Orthodox use no instruments.” And even though the music is largely the same from week to week, “you fall into the presence of God in a way you never can when flipping from prayer book to bulletin to hymnal.”<sup>54</sup> In other words, the ethos of liturgical worship is a defining aspect of Orthodox identity, and the lack of instrumental music is essential to that ethos.

These different modes of appeal for the anti-instrument argument fall under one criterion: Tradition. Gresham notes that “[t]he battle between traditional Byzantine chanters and organ-choirs is, in the eyes of both parties, a battle for tradition.”<sup>55</sup> The same is true for the parties for and against instrumental music within the life of the church. Orthodox self-identity is seen as being faithful to the entity of Tradition, which is mutable and, to a degree, user-definable. The category of Tradition for one group includes patristic writings and liturgical ethos; the category of Tradition for the other includes the Byzantine legacy and the patristic context, which includes the writings and their rhetorical causes.

## UNITY IN DIVERSITY

The criterion of Orthodoxy is a person; Jesus Christ is the canon of truth.<sup>56</sup> Appeals to Tradition are blind without appeal to the person of Christ who illumines all things, while appeals to an ethnic legacy are stillborn without the source of our true fatherland. The categories of dispute and validity are clearly at hand in the above debates: the contents of the dispute are the use of organs within Orthodox liturgical worship, and the validators are the myriad of sources appealed to in order to bolster one’s argument. But neither side takes into account the essential benefit and criterion of diversity, which is unavoidable when one holds the person of Jesus Christ as the canon of truth, the criterion of Orthodoxy.

Layers of tradition gradually accrete, concealing the content of the tradition. Behr points out a similar situation for scriptural studies: “the confusion that exists

53 Ibid.

54 Frederica Mathewes-Green, “12 Things I Wish I’d Known,” Frederica.com, <http://www.frederica.com/12-things/> (10 May 2013).

55 Gresham, 156.

56 Cf. Behr, 52–64.

today regarding the basis of Christian faith results from taking for granted the existence of the New Testament, and then turning to it for the primary testimony to Christ and considering its allusions to the Old Testament as a secondary layer ....<sup>57</sup> Similarly, there is confusion in both aspects of the instrument argument—for and against—between the contour of the Tradition and its content: the crucified and risen Christ.

An hypostasized belief in a person leaves room for a startling amount of diversity, as noted in the introduction. Jesus Christ has an identity: that means aspects of him change and aspects remain the same. Christ is “the same, yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8), yet he “increased in wisdom and in stature” (Luke 2:52). The early Christian attitude towards diversity shows a healthy respect for divergent opinions, and a view that such diversity is in fact necessary for the living the life of Christ. For example, Peter Lampe notes that, in Rome, “before the end of the second century, specifically before the episcopacy of Victor, hardly any Roman Christian group excluded another group in the city from the communion of the faithful—except for a few significant exceptions.”<sup>58</sup> Irenaeus, who proffered a solution to the conflict between Victor and the Quartodecimans, famously wrote that, “disagreement in regard to the fast confirms the agreement in the faith.”<sup>59</sup> It would be cynical to state that all attempts to eliminate healthy diversity in church life arise from the ascendancy of a monarchical episcopacy, an ascendancy which Lampe traces in Rome throughout the second century.<sup>60</sup> But, in reality, the tension between unity and diversity exists constantly in Christian belief and history; the pages and manuscripts of the New Testament bear witness to this, as mentioned in the introduction. In appealing to this model of cohesion, I am not referring to a bygone golden age where unity was preserved in the face of diversity; there are obvious cases of the splintering of diversity, such as with Marcion (who, along with Valentinus, excommunicated *himself* from the assembly, not the other way around).

Ultimately, diversity is iconological; icons, as visual texts, are polyvalent, allowing for a multiplicity of meanings to shine through.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, debate in Orthodoxy is iconological, approaching the questions of propriety, truth, and orthodoxy through the dialectics of dispute and validation. The debate concerning organ usage, as outlined above, is representative of Orthodox debate in general: its sources and criteria are obvious, and there is no obvious solution to the problem. Debate is endemic to Orthodox identity, but solution is not; solution, however, is usually only conceived of in legal or formal-logical terms. The solution in an iconological system is not formally logical, as Irenaeus asserts: our disagreement in one matter confirms our agreement in a greater matter. Although I have pointed out several areas for further study in this regard, the example of the debate over organ use is representative of the modern conception of Orthodox identity, particularly with regard to the safeguarding of purity. But while safeguarding purity is often the primary concern, an iconological framework seeking Jesus Christ in all things necessitates a healthy approach to diversity.

57 Behr, 49.

58 Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries*, trans. Michael Steinhauser, ed. Marshall D. Johnson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003 [1989]), 385.

59 In Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.24.13

60 A similar process can be gleaned from Eusebius’s writings about Origen in Alexandria (especially *EH* 6.2-3).

61 Cf. Kartsonis, “The Responding Icon.”