

A Real-Life Comparison

Gary McDade

The current efforts to justify instrumental music in worship that are coming out of Richland Hills Church of Christ in Fort Worth, Texas and its preacher Rick Atchley if accepted could be used to support other erroneous practices like infant baptism. An argument Atchley gives in his three part video series “The Both/And Church” runs something like this: Since God accepted instrumental music in worship in the Old Testament period and does not specifically condemn its use in the New Testament, then it must be all right to worship with the instrument. For a complete investigation and refutation of Richland Hills’ new position on accepting instrumental music in worship see “Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing,” the April 2007 edition of *The Spiritual Sword* edited by Alan E. Highers (38:3).

The real-life comparison of this kind of argument currently may be seen from a Catholic scholar named Scott Hahn. He “is a professor of theology and Scripture at the Franciscan University of Steubenville and was recently appointed to the Pope Benedict XVI Chair of Biblical Theology and Liturgical Proclamation of Saint Vincent Seminary (Latrobe, Pennsylvania)” (Hahn, book jacket). Hahn tells how during his college days he studied the subject of infant baptism and justifies the practice he and others had experienced in being baptized as infants.

These New Testament passages [he listed Matthew 19:14; 28:19-20; and Acts 2:38-39] made the case for infant baptism plausible to me, if not quite as explicit as I would have preferred. But when I read the reasons that scholars and sages had marshaled from the *whole* Bible—*both* testaments—the case was over-whelming. When I considered Jesus’ “New Covenant” in the light of the history of God’s covenants with His people, I saw that provision was always made for the inclusion of infants. If God welcomed newborns into Israel by means of ritual circumcision for two thousand years, why would He suddenly close the kingdom to babies because they could not understand ritual baptism? And if He had intended to make such a radical change in the terms of the covenant, wouldn’t He have said so explicitly? (Hahn, 8).

See the similarity of the reasoning? God accepted instrumental music/infant “member-ship” in the Old Testament and did not explicitly say, “Thou shalt not have instrumental music”/“Thou shalt not have infant membership” in the church today, therefore God wants instrumental music/infant membership in the church today. On that basis, how could one of these practices be allowable and the other forbidden? So if that is the basis of the reasoning used, then not just infant

membership but a veritable plethora of other practices could be brought into the church today.

See the similarity of the reasoning?

Mr. Hahn shares the same disparity Rick Atchley does when speaking of something being stated “explicitly” in the New Testament. They both like to use that reasoning negatively but do not use it positively. They make a demand of the scriptures negatively which they reject positively, that is, they both want to see an “explicit” prohibition of instrumental music/infant baptism or they will stand by the conviction that it is permitted. Neither man feels obliged to show where the New Testament calls for instrumental music/infant baptism positively. Where do the scriptures call for the practices? At least the Catholic admits he prefers something from the New Testament that would be more explicit; Atchley never expresses such a wish. Perhaps this is an admission of the weakness of the position from the Catholic and a display of resolute stubbornness from the Christian.

Another fatal weakness from the pen of the Catholic is in that he tries to make parallel the covenant of circumcision from the Old Testament with infant baptism today. The fact that the two subjects are not even parallel is sustained in the observation that circumcision pertained only to baby boys and not to baby girls. Weren't the baby girls welcomed into Israel too? If the ritual of circumcision was parallel to baptism, then only the male of the species would require baptism today. The writer of Hebrews spoke to the point of the differences between the covenants, “For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away” (Heb. 8:8-13).

REFERENCES

Hahn, Scott (2007) *Reasons To Believe, How to Understand, Explain, and Defend the Catholic Faith* (N.Y., N.Y.: Doubleday).