

Instrumental Cravings

Dub McClish

The controversy over mechanical instruments of music in Christian worship began when they were first introduced ten centuries too late to be employed with Divine approval in the church of Christ. The controversy continues to be as current as the last tick of the clock. Those who know even a smattering of the history of the Lord's church in the U.S.A. know that the instrument is one of the two horses on which liberal-minded brethren rode out in the last half of the nineteenth century into full-fledged apostasy and denominationalism. Their apostasy resulted in the formation of the dual-headed Christian Church monstrosity a little more than a century ago.

History has a habit of repeating itself, or more accurately, men have a habit of repeating history (including, and sometimes especially, the **errors** of their predecessors). Some who still want to be recognized as part of the church today seem to have arrived at the same juncture in the evolution/erosion of their convictions on this issue as evinced by those of that bygone era.

The gift of prophecy was not required to see it coming. Over the past few decades, a growing number of "our" folk have moved in that direction. As they have increasingly watered down the doctrine they preached and practiced, broadened the scope of things religious they could tolerate, and praised and cozied-up to the denominations, the time was bound to come when the instrument would no longer be an issue with them. Consistency demanded that, if they did not retreat from the spiritual precipice they were steadily approaching, they must eventually plunge all the way over it.

The use of instruments in worship is only one of several such items that are but symptomatic of their underlying spiritual malady – rejection of the authority of the Son of God through His Word (Col. 3:17). However, instrumental music in worship has served (and continues to serve) as somewhat of a last fence to hem people in. Once cut they cut or jump it, there is nothing but open range. It is a religious Rubicon that undeniably declares one's direction and intent. Adoption of the instrument signals *freedom* in the awfulest sense of the term – **freedom from the limits** God has placed upon His church.

For over a century, numerous religious bodies (especially in the Midwest states) have retained "Church of Christ" as their name, but which, in truth, are Independent Christian Churches that were a part of the digression previously referenced. These, of course, to the last

one, have employed instruments in their worship (along with several other unauthorized innovations).

However, congregations now exist that still dare display “Church of Christ” on their property (and that began as faithful congregations) but now proudly encourage and/or employ the use of instruments in their worship. A few years ago, I visited the Website of the Otter Creek “Church of Christ,” in Nashville, Tennessee, that described some of its services that featured instrumental combos.

A more recent example is The Hills “Church of Christ,” originally founded as the Richland Hills Church of Christ (a Fort Worth, Texas, suburban congregation). Though founded decades ago by faithful brethren who specifically forbade the use of instruments in worship in their founding documents, its modern elders have given the green light for their use. One member who had been a member of the congregation fifteen years and had swallowed the long list of its incremental departures could not go this far. Consequently, he wrote a “termination of membership” letter to the elders, which in part stated:

In it [i.e., your policy statement on church music] you give your approval to worshiping God with addition of mechanical instruments of music in any and all activities of the church, including all classes and ministries of this church. For reasons best known to yourselves, you made the sole exception in your new law for the congregation: namely that in Sunday morning and Wednesday evening public assemblies you will allow only a cappella singing. This new direction is in opposition to the clear charter statement of the founders of this church which you changed in later years....

For whatever reasons these elders excepted Sunday morning and Wednesday evening assemblies (they apparently no longer assemble on Sunday evenings) for use of instruments, it is certain that these “reasons” will quickly vanish. The letter goes on to mention that Jon Jones (former RH preacher), in his elder acceptance speech, belittled the idea that a cappella singing is the only kind authorized by Christ in His church. The letter also states that Rick Atchley (preacher who succeeded Jones) has never preached a sermon on instrumental music in his thirteen years in the pulpit there (except to ridicule a cappella-only music in worship) and he stated that he never would do so.

For the many of us who have watched the steady, but certain, spiritual suicide of this congregation over the past number of years, the decision referenced above was not an “if,” but only a “when.” Now, if we could only get them to be honest enough to remove “Church of Christ” from their sign! Those who wanted to project an image of loyalty to Holy Writ, all the

while they continued to defend this church when several of us were pointing to her many departures over the years, ought to be ashamed.

The second case is of more recent vintage, and it comes as no more of a surprise than the first. The *Abilene Reporter-News* carried the following story, in part:

A trio of musicians with Abilene ties will perform traditional and contemporary worship music Sunday night. Soprano saxophonist J. Eric Wilson, guitarist Dan Mitchell, and keyboardist/vocalist Sarah Lynn Grubb will perform at 7 p.m. Sunday at Highland Church of Christ's auditorium, 425 Highland....

This is the same location (and bears the same name) as the congregation where the faithful James D. Willeford preached for several years and where my late wife and I attended when I was not preaching elsewhere during my student days at ACC (1957–1959, now ACU), **but it is the same in location and name only**. In those days, and for a few years thereafter, the venerable E.R. Harper was associated with this church as a speaker on its fledgling “Herald of Truth” radio program, when it broadcast only the pure and simple Gospel. However, over the years, Highland’s departures can be traced by its string of preachers: Mid McKnight, John Allen Chalk, Lynn Anderson, and Mike Cope (Rubel Shelly’s original co-editor of *Wineskins* magazine).

For those who still insist, contrary to the massive evidence of many years now, that all is well on ACU’s sacred hill, I quote a few more words from the news story: “Wilson and Mitchell teach music at Abilene Christian University. Grubb is a 2000 ACU graduate....” This account not only demonstrates the utter lack of Scriptural scruples at Highland, but at ACU as well. Read it and weep, all who love Zion.

Endnote

1. Postscript: At the time of uploading this article on *The Scripture Cache* (09/02/2021) the Highland Church Website ([click HERE](#)) lists the following schedule of Sunday meetings:

9:00 am – A Cappella Service

10:00 am – Bible Class

11:00 am – Instrumental Service

[**Note:** I wrote this MS, and it originally appeared in the September 2002 issue of *The Gospel Journal*, a 36-page monthly of which I was editor at the time.]

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