

---

# CHURCH HISTORY

---

“Now these things took place as examples for us...”

---

## Appendix II - History of Church Music, Pt. 2

---

### Reformation Leaders on Instrumental Music

---

Opposition to instrumental music in worship is found beginning with the earliest reformers. Here are some of their clear statements of opposition:

John Wycliffe (1320-1384)

He considered the use of ceremonies and images and organs “a relapse into Judaism, which seeks after signs, and a departure from the spiritual nature of Christianity.”

Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531)

In condemning the use of instruments in worship He wrote, “Everything which is added to the true institutions of Christ is an abuse.”

John Calvin (1509-1564)

vehemently opposed instrumental music. In contrasting OT and NT worship he wrote, “I have no doubt that playing upon cymbals, touching the harp and the viol, and all that kind of music...was a part of the (OT) education...But when they frequent their sacred assemblies, musical instruments in celebrating (continued on next page)

### The Reformation

Luther’s revolution was fueled not only by corruption of the Catholic church but by its ostentatious churches and worship services. The reformers believed all such lavish showiness must be stripped away and the Bible be the guide for all phases of Christian life, including worship. There were, however two differing views regarding the authority of scripture. Luther’s view: anything not expressly forbidden was acceptable. Zwingli’s view: only what was expressly revealed was approved by God. These views produced diverging paths on instrumental music. Zwingli felt so strongly about superfluous and showy forms of music in worship that he pretty much rejected all forms including singing.

Luther also spoke out against the abuses of music in worship. He thought grace could not be administered through theatrical performance of musical instruments. He once referred to the organ in worship as “the insignia of Baal.” But his view of biblical authority would not lead him to outright forbid its use. As a result, instrumental music was found in churches whose liturgy was closely related to Catholicism. Lutheran as well as Anglican churches (Church of England) used instruments. But non-Lutheran Protestants roundly rejected musical instruments as having no authority in scripture. The Reformed and the Anabaptists would also reject it along with Puritans and Quakers.

When these Protestant churches came to America, they came without organs. Seventeenth century New England churches had no organs. When the wealthy Bostonian Thomas Brattle died in 1713, he left his personal organ to his own Puritan church - which rejected it. Instead it went to an Episcopal (Anglican) church, which became one of the first colonial churches to install one. As late as 1800 there were only about 20 organs in New England churches, and they did not become widespread until instrumental music became more culturally acceptable later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### The Restoration Movement

By the early 1800’s instrumental music was becoming more accepted in mainstream denominations and other Protestant

(Continued from pg. 1)

the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the Law.”

Menno Simons (1496-1561) one founder of the Anabaptists, wrote, “There is not a word to be found in Scripture concerning their anointing, crosses, caps, togas, unclean purifications, cloisters, chapels, organs, choral music, masses, offerings, ancient usages, etc.”

John Knox (1513-1572) was a devoted disciple of John Calvin. John Price writes of Knox’s strong opposition to instrumental music: “The legacy of John Knox, in the exclusive vocal singing of the Scottish Reformed churches, has continued for hundreds of years even down to the present day.” The first pipe organ was not installed in Glasgow Cathedral until 1879. But by 1900 instrumental music was the norm in most Scottish Reformed churches.

The opposition to instrumental music in the Reformation by individual leaders was also seen in the decisions of church synods throughout Europe. Numerous quotations could be listed of decisions of synods throughout Europe and the British Isles expressing opposition. Strong opposition was also pronounced by Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Quakers, and other groups in America until the 1800’s.

churches. But, another movement arose during this time. Denominational division and factional creeds produced a renewed effort to return to the Bible alone as authority. The Restoration Movement begins in the British Isles and spreads to America by the early 1800’s. Its leaders reflected an approach to biblical authority championed by Ulrich Zwingli during the Reformation - only what is expressly revealed in scripture is authorized. Like Zwingli, Restoration leaders rejected instrumental music. The plea for simple New Testament Christianity produced simple worship based upon what could be gleaned from New Testament practice. This view regarding instrumental music held sway in the movement until second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

As we observed in our general study of church worship history, cultural pressures and the desire for acceptance influence changes in religious movements. In the mid 1800’s the success of the Restoration Movement led many to desire acceptance into the general society as an equal to the successful established denominations. As these pressures changed views on biblical authority, many denominational practices, including instrumental music became accepted in a large segment of the movement. The more progressive wing accepted instrumental music, along with other significant changes. The smaller, conservative wing, identified as churches of Christ continued to reject instruments and most do so to this day. A separation of the two factions was complete by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

### **Churches of Christ into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.**

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century churches of Christ have divided over other issues but almost all have continued to reject instrumental music in worship. Many debates on the topic have been held with denominational preachers. Voluminous writings from all segments of churches of Christ testify to the strong opposition to the practice. Even today it is extremely rare to find a congregation using musical instruments. However, respect for expressed biblical authority has weakened. It is not uncommon to find many churches who do not use instruments mainly out of tradition, not out of biblical conviction. Respect for expressed biblical authority is waning among churches of Christ.

### **Styles of Music in Churches of Christ**

Though instrumental music may be rejected, there have been other changes in music styles and practices. Some are within biblical authority. Others, at the very least, push the bounds of what is authorized and some are stepping over the line.

Music styles seem to come and go through the decades. Emphasis on different types of music change. Emphasis of hymns of praise; singing quartet and choral style selections, more complicated and intricate selections, more or less emphasis on style and harmonies - are all styles and wax and wane. But more recently among more progressive churches, innovations have appeared that are views as attempts to “improve” singing. Praise

.....

## Restoration Leaders on Instrumental Music

.....

Churches in the Restoration were uniform in their rejection of instrumental music. In fact, it was hardly even discussed in its early decades. In 1851 Alexander Campbell writing on adding solemnity to worship said, "If churches had no real devotion or spirituality, then instrumental music might be an essential prerequisite to devotion...To all spiritually minded Christians, such aids would be as a cow bell in a concert." After his statement the issues lies dormant for another 10 years.

Innumerable quotations from men throughout two centuries of Restoration history - like Benjamin Franklin, Moses Lard, David Lipscomb, J.W. McGarvey - emphasize its rejection. Attempts at its introduction contributed to a division that produced the more liberal Disciples of Christ/Christian Church movement.

teams are one example, where skilled singers wearing microphones are scattered throughout the assembly. Choral forms of singing where more skilled singers sing together but from their seats; not standing together as a choir; separate but adjoining singing services in which quartets and choruses perform, sometimes including soloists. Musical accompaniment can be found in some of these services. Now there are examples of choirs in worship and a few examples of instrumental music. This is especially true where a church has decided to have two services to accommodate two different worship styles - one traditional and one "contemporary." As another generation arises, accepting the cultural view of toleration of all forms of religion and worship, the mainstream churches of Christ will no doubt follow the common worship practices found throughout Christendom.

### Summary

For 2000 years the patterns of New Testament Christianity often appear and then seem to disappear. They change with changing views of biblical authority. They change with the desire to be like the denominations. They change when we seek worship that satisfies our own carnal desires instead of seeking to honor God as He instructs.

We face the same challenge of every generation - will we seek to cling to the Bible teaching on worship or will we seek to embellish and change what is revealed in His Word? Will we seek reverence and honor for God or will we seek to make worship more entertaining and pleasing to the ears?

We must not only evaluate what is specifically authorized. We must also strive to offer what is in the *spirit* of New Testament worship, respecting God's desire for honor, reverence and glory to His name. These are our guiding principles. May we always be committed to them.