

Spiritual Considerations...

Selected articles designed to assist in our Bible study and Christian walk.



Dave Phillips, editor

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Grappling with Sensitive Subjects Like Instrumental Music In Worship

Dave Phillips, Germantown

It is always a challenge to deal with sensitive issues in religious discussions, and the number of sensitive topics seems to be growing. The method of defining a sensitive topic might be stated as "any topic that causes an emotional reaction to someone in the church." We need to be careful that our discussion is not unnecessarily inflammatory, but we must be able to discuss these issues.

No topic is more inflammatory than a discussion of our singing. Everyone has preferences on the way a preacher should preach, a song should be sung, a prayer should be led, the Lord's Supper should be served, and the contribution should be collected. I admit that I have my own preferences. But when do we cross the line from preferences in style (highly subjective) to compliance with the will of God (unquestionably demanded)? Do we just continue to seek groups that appeal to our tastes or do we honestly sit down and struggle with the Bible as it relates to these discussions?

I was in a gathering recently when a very nice lady whispered to me that she would love to visit our church, but she couldn't give up her music. Having heard that for many years, I tried to kindly reply that we have music, and I think enjoyable music, but we just do not use any instrument. But we didn't have time, nor was it the place, to discuss at length the reason that we don't.

I remember G. P. Holt, preaching in Indianapolis, telling of his asking the congregation where he preached why they didn't have a piano at their church. One lady spoke up and said, "I've always wondered the same thing, and if you begin to take a contribution, you can count on me for five dollars."

At some point, we must get beyond an initial emotional reaction and look at the impact of these serious issues on our lives. I have reprinted some articles that show the impact of these studies on our fellowship and the serious nature of the implications to our Christian walk.

Music's Role in Defining our Fellowship's Identity

(reprinted with permission from Christian Chronicle, November, 1999)

Nashville, TN - Music in worship may be a key issue in defining the future of our fellowship, surmised the Nashville *Tennessean* in an Aug. 29 report about the resignation of a Lipscomb University professor.

Doug Varnado, minister of the Community Church of Christ, Hendersonville, Tenn., resigned after 17 years on the Lipscomb faculty because his congregation uses instrumental music in Sunday worship, the *Tennessean* reported.

"If Community church is going to be an instrumental congregation, that's not in accord with our policy," Lipscomb President Steve Flatt told the *Tennessean*. "Our identity for the last 108 years has included a cappella."

Flatt told the *Chronicle*, "Our policy is not meant to reflect who is or is not in the Kingdom. It reflects a small part of an operating procedure which best allows Lipscomb to serve."

Varnado, 46, whom the *Tennessean* decried as a "visible, popular presence at Lipscomb," was an assistant professor of Bible and directed the school's mission programs.

The newspaper report said that the 500 member Community Church of Christ tested the limits of Church of Christ identity when leaders there declared that the music question - a cappella vs. instrumental - is not a "salvation" issue, saying that it's unimportant if the church adds instrumental music on occasion. More important, the leaders said, is maintaining a faith community that shows compassion for people seeking God.

One Community minister resigned in the wake of the church's stance and five other church members, teachers or staff at church-related Goodpasture Christian School, also left.

"Our policy on a cappella music reflects our primary constituents," Flatt told the Chronicle. "Virtually all churches of Christ are a cappella, and we don't need to apologize for that. There are good reasons for our stance, including unity and harmony on campus."

Ron Cook, Bible class teacher at Community and author of a new book, Ground Zero: Starting Over with God, predicts that the music issue in Churches of Christ will fade away once young churchgoers, awash daily in music, become church leaders, the *Tennessean* reported.

"Instrumental music is already a part of youth events that happen at churches," Cook said. "Teenagers love Christian music. Music is a fact of life. It's inevitable."

The *Tennessean* characterized the church of Christ controversy over music as typical of traditional vs. contemporary thought debates gripping every religious body today.

"Instruments are consider unbiblical..." the *Tennessean* explained. "For generations it (a cappella music) has been a fiercely defended, and debated, mark of identity for Churches of Christ."

"The debate over music might look uneventful to outsiders, but it's a pressure point in a church fellowship that looks to Scripture as an ultimate, detailed guide to life and worship," wrote *Tennessean* religion editor Ray Waddle. - Lindy Adams

Early Church History and the Instrumental Music Controversy

(Everett Ferguson - Abilene, Texas)

The Instrumental Music Issue, Gospel Advocate, 1987, p. 100

Without attempting here a complete theology of music from patristic literature, I will summarize some points from the texts I have garnered for my study.

1. Instruments of music belonged to the childhood of the human race's spiritual development. They appealed to the senses and have now been abolished from the Christian assemblies with the other types and shadows of the Old Testament.
2. The human body is the true instrument for praising God. Praise is to be offered with the voice, with the understanding, and with good works.
3. Psalm singing is a spiritual sacrifice, pleasing to God and beneficial to the one singing and the one listening. It lifts thoughts to God and calms the soul.
4. Congregational singing exemplifies the harmony of body and soul and the harmony of man with God, which is the goal of God's plan. It expresses the unity of the church.

Those are worthy theological reflections and the attainment of their goals requires vocal song, unaccompanied by instruments.

More Thoughts on the Instrumental Music Issue

(Jimmy Jividen, Abilene Texas)

Taken from Worship In Song, Ft. Worth, Texas; Star Publications, 1987, 134, 135.

Refusing to respect the silence of the Scriptures ultimately leads to total apostasy. It was through the refusal to respect the silence of the Scriptures that some baptize babies; others exalt a pope; others put forth new revelation; others claim charismatic gifts; others burn incense; others use instrumental music in worship. What allows one allows all of the others. One cannot consistently reject any of these innovations if he allows just one.

The real issue should not be what does the silence of the Scriptures allow, but what does the teaching of the Scriptures authorize. One's attitude in Bible study must not focus on what one can get by with and still make heaven. His attitude should rather focus on what one can do which most assuredly is pleasing to God.

Closing Thoughts for this Issue

The topic of music in the worship assembly is very sensitive, partly because it involves all of us who worship. Singing expresses deep emotional feelings, touches deep spiritual longings, and addresses deep spiritual needs that we all have. It is no wonder that we must think seriously and reflectively on this topic in order to appreciate the privilege and responsibility of worship more fully.