

The Driving Force for Today's Changes

History:

The churches of the *Restoration Movement*, (Known in the religious world as the Stone-Campbell Movement) Churches of Christ (A Cappella), Christian Churches, (Disciples of Christ) and second group of the Christian Churches were all one fellowship until they split over the use of instrumental music in the worship service.

<http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/restmov.html> This website will give you a quick overview of the movement and those who were involved at its inception.

- A. The split over the instrumental use of music has been the major split of the churches of the *Restoration Movement*.
 1. There have been smaller splits on each side since this major split but this has been the one that was the most destructive.
 2. This split started in approximately 1880 and in 1906 the U.S. Census Bureau recognized the two groups as different religious organizations. They both still stated that their roots were in the *Restoration Movement*.
 3. In the 1960s the Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University made an open statement that they were no long part of the *Restoration Movement* because they denied the legitimacy of its principles. TCU is stated to be part of the Disciples of Christ group which is the conservative wing of that part of the split that accepted the instrument—Brite does not seem to realize that.

- B. Flash back to 1906.
 1. The churches of Christ (A Cappella) found themselves with one brick church building and only one minister with a Masters degree at the time of the official recognition.
 2. This happened to be the year that a group of Christians in Abilene started an elementary school called Childress Classical Institute which was the beginning of Abilene Christianity University. This was a coincidental date but ACU has always been a driving force in the *Restoration Movement*.
<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c109:H.+Res.+531>
 3. This group of churches, *on the other side of the tracks*, remained very evangelistic. This had always been part of its history.
 4. By the mid 1960s the Churches of Christ (A Cappella) completely dwarfed the First Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ). The liberal side of the Christian churches was all but dead.
 5. If number of members, size of churches, and number of church building were used as a measuring stick as to success and defeat between the two groups, the Churches of Christ won by a landslide.
 6. This measuring stick of size and numbers does not compare to the rest of the denominational world. It far out shadows anything that has to do with the Restoration movement.

7. There is a web site of the “Ten Largest Churches.”
http://www.sliceoflaodicea.com/archives/2006/02/top_10_largest.php Even the website has an interesting name attached to it—“A Slice of Laodicea.”
 8. There was a book written in the 70’s about the ten largest churches in the U.S. They were the ten largest then but are no longer. They all had a common tie. All their ministers had served as associate ministers of J. Frank Norris in Fort Worth at the Second Baptist church. That is an interesting story within itself.
 9. The reason “size” is being stressed is because that has become the chief and primary measuring stick of success in the American church of any brand of theology.
- C. By the mid 1980s the Church of Christ begin to lose its zeal for evangelism as it had known it in years past. *Success seems to always help the successful to relax.*
1. There was one church in the suburbs of Nashville, Tennessee, the Madison Church of Christ that had approximately 3,000 members.
 2. Even before “mega churches” were so identified, that congregation fit the criteria that are being used today. It was built around the personality of its minister, Dr. Ira North.
 3. The largest church in Texas was the Broadway congregation in Lubbock, Texas. It too was built around the personality of one man, Dr. M. Norvel Young. Dr. Young left Broadway to accept the position of president of Pepperdine University in the mid 1950s.
 4. Up to this period ministers in the churches of Christ would change congregations freely throughout the U.S. There was always that desire to climb the ecclesiastical ladder.
 5. Though written tongue-in-cheek about the Methodist hierarchy, Benjamin Brooks’ *How to Be a Bishop Without Being Religious* became the caricature of what was happening throughout American Protestantism.
 6. The commonality in doctrine between ministers of the Churches of Christ so overshadowed its brotherhood that a minister was hired on his record of success and his preaching style in the pulpit. Their sermon outlines essentially came from the same cookie cutter.
 7. If he was a faithful minister of the church of Christ any eldership in another congregation automatically accepted his theology.
 8. The desire to succeed in numbers, size of congregations, and a “new church building,” became the driving force without the brotherhood knowing or acknowledging its implications.
 9. This force has its counterpart in the world of TV *ratings*. If the congregation is not “growing” (increasing in numbers) then the minister is at fault and the game of *musical chairs* among the preaching brethren was an ongoing game that was never to end.
 10. However, churches of Christ in the early 2000s have become so fragmented that the hiring of a “new minister” becomes an arduous task.
 11. The new minister’s theology, which was always accepted as being “down the party line” is now totally different.

12. The new minister has to be thoroughly “checked out” and equally so the minister has to “check out the elders” of the new congregation to see if they match his theological stance.
13. Changing pulpits is no longer the easy game of musical chairs as it was in the middle and late 1900s.

D. Fast forward to the 21st century.

1. With the lethargy of Christianity seen in the Churches of Christ as its growth history platitudes, newly devised methods in style and doctrinal presentations begin to make themselves known.
2. Such a change became prominently obvious when a minister in San Antonio, Texas dropped two positions of doctrine in the Churches of Christ. The Oak Hills Church of Christ dropped the name Church of Christ and became known as The Church. The second part of the name was what was being desired as the emphasis. Max Lucado is the minister and the identity of this congregation became known as “Max Lucado’s church.”
3. Everybody that still holds on to the vestiges of Christianity wants to say they are a member of the church whose minister is the best known Christian novelist in the English speaking world.
4. To be a member there certainly will help lead those people into a world of “better people.” The problem is that Christianity is far more than being just a better person. There is a devotion and commitment to Jesus Christ that is central to sanctification. The Glorification of God, His son, and the Holy Spirit is the aim of the Christian faith not the glorification of its minister.
5. Tragically these people have fallen into the same hole the rest of those who have accepted that “size” is the measurement stick for success in the Christian faith. In the specific case of this individual congregation there is a unique slot in this deceptive pit and it is centered around the preacher.
6. At the same time Lucado stated that while the congregation was keeping its *fundamental stance* it no longer taught that baptism was necessary for the remission of sins. i.e. Baptism was no longer necessary for membership of the Oak Hills congregation.
7. These changes “worked” to increase the growth. The Oak Hills Church tripled its membership over night.
8. Clearly the identity of the Oak Hills congregation from the Churches of Christ, and its tie to the Restoration Movement was what was holding it back—with size being the measuring stick.
9. *Everybody* wants to be part of Max Lucado’s Church if the doctrine is bland and undemanding.

E. But still the greater change within many congregations of the Churches of Christ was yet to come.

1. While this change is not as drastic as Lucado’s change, the effect will be more dramatic and will eventually bring about another split within the A Cappella side of the Churches of Christ.
2. At the Abilene Christian Bible Lectures this past year, 2006, Rick Atchley, a keynote speaker, stated his intention to begin fellowship with a First Christian Church in Kentucky. (One might ask, “Why did he have to go to

Kentucky to find this new fellowship? Did the distance make his desire to change look safer to those opposed to his new found fellowship!) He said that when they were in Kentucky they would use the instrument but when they were in Fort Worth they would sing A Cappella.

- i. The opposing view is that you have traditionalized the issue and by definition it is no longer doctrinal. It will be only a short period of time before the instrument is used in the A Cappella churches if a “traditional” stance is taken.
 - ii. This statement of the opposing view has proven to be true.
 - iii. Rather than “worship with the instrument in Kentucky and A Cappella at home” Rich Atchley has introduced the instrument in “Saturday Evening Services.” The Richland Hills Church of Christ, the largest congregation among 13,000 Churches of Christ, now uses the instrument.
3. At first blush, and this is the way it is being perceived—the A Cappella group, while having won the fight in acceptance and growth, has now decided that the First Christian Church was right all along and they are going to the First Christian church position.

F. Here is where the issue is being totally missed.

1. The A Cappella congregations going to the instrumental music worship to be in agreement with the other side of the Restoration Movement is not the reason for making this move at all.
2. Going to the instrumental music side is because that is what the rest of the Christian world does. Such a change will make the one time A Cappella group more “main stream”
3. In actuality making this move “through the First Christian Church” softens the effect of what is actually happening.
4. What no one seems to realize is that going to the instrument in worship was a natural step in the change “to increase the numbers.”
5. The First Christian church “just happened to be on the tracks” in this movement with the A Cappella congregations that want to change.
6. The change to the instrumental music worship is only the first change for the majority of those who are changing.
7. Once you get the resistance watered down many more changes are on the way.
8. While Max Lucado’s congregation dropping the necessity of baptism was premature for those that are willing to change, the long term effect will be the same.

G. Dr. Dan Wallace, professor of New Testament Greek at Dallas Theological Seminary, stated in a special program at the Grace Church in Houston that Christianity was going through a “dumbing down” process to make the demands less rigid and easier to accept.

1. This has been happening in the Churches of Christ for the past thirty years.
2. Accepting the instrument in worship services is in actuality a “smoke screen” for what is happening.

3. To increase numbers in attendance the heart and soul of the Restoration Movement is being removed.
4. Twenty years from now the remaining A Cappella Churches of Christ will thank the First Christian Churches for taking this group.
5. At the same time the First Christian (Disciples of Christ) will be lamenting their acceptance of this “newly awakened A Cappella group.”

The ultimate desire is to make the demands of religion

- *More palatable –which will make it easier to accept*
- *More streamlined –so that the congregation can get their “religious duty” over with in an hour.*

Some far-reaching effects upon the Churches of Christ that move in the direction being characterized by adopting instrumental music in worship are:

- *When you remove the urgency you remove the necessity.*
- *Baptisms will be scheduled on a quarterly schedule because one baptism will add 30 minutes to the services. If such an event happens regularly the services will be stretched out regularly and that will keep some from attending. Convenience is an absolute necessity if the mega church is to succeed.*
- *Communion services will be removed to once a quarter or an event totally removed. It is impossible to serve a congregation of two to three thousand without taking 15 to 20 minutes. (This is to say nothing as to what is happening to the meaning of communion when it is served as if the congregation was taking an antidote for anthrax—get it and get it down so we can get on with the service.)*

*All changes being accepted, one of the many curses of the creation of this type of organization will be the loss of the **personality** of the individual who created the “mega church.” It has been reported that someone wrote, “It is appointed for all men to die.” Who knows, that could even be found in the Bible. Once he/she is gone it will be impossible to get “another perfect fit.” When this happens the “mega church” will become flabby and slowly chock itself to death with the bills of “maintenance of the church building.”*