

The Search for Truth:  
A History of the Restoration Movement  
“Instrumental Music and the Division of the Restoration Effort”  
December 31, 2017

INTRODUCTION:

One of the obvious differences between churches of Christ and Protestant as well as Catholic churches is our non-use of mechanical instruments of music in worship. It is a matter of historical record that the Orthodox church did not and do not use instruments in their worship; the Catholic Church brought it in with many other innovations. When Protestantism formed, the reformers rejected the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship.

In a book written towards this end of the controversy which we are talking about this morning, M. C. Kurfees with a church of Christ in Louisville, KY in 1911, wrote a book on the subject and studied it fairly thoroughly. In that book, he shows that a leading Methodist commentator, Adam Clarke, was against instruments as was Marvin Vincent (Presbyterian), Heinrich Meyer (Lutheran), and John Calvin (Presbyterian, of all people) and Zwingli (North, 221). In fact, the introduction of instruments led to division within other groups, the Free Methodists, the Primitive Baptists, and the Reformed Presbyterians. So the introduction of mechanical instruments of music in worship among the Protestants was in spite of and against the learning and scholarship of many of their own leading voices. But, what hits the denominational world will one day hit Christians and instrumental music in worship did, in the mid 1800s.

There are some churches of Christ today who have decided that instrumental music is a non-issue and have decided that if they are going to grow and thrive in the modern culture, they have to bring in the instrument. That argument is sad because it is so weak and irrational. If the millennial generation has left churches of Christ because we have been historically against mechanical instruments of music in worship, then why are the millennials leaving the Baptists and Methodists and Jews and Mormons and Muslims? I read a book last year by Naomi Riley who is a columnist for the NY Post and WSJ called ***Got Religion? How Churches, Mosques, and Synagogues Can Bring Young People Back***. Do you see - Protestants, Jews, Mormons, and Muslims are all losing ground among the millennials and that fight has nothing to do with mechanical instruments of music in worship. If you want to reach the millennials, fine. But instruments in worship is a shallow response to a deeper problem.

But, this is a historical survey, so let's begin at the beginning...

THE ORIGINS:

It comes as no surprise that on the frontier of America, musical instruments were not used, if for no other reason than financial. Small churches simply did not have the financial means to buy some type of organ or other instrument. There was a brief but intense flair-up in some churches over instruments of music in worship in KY in 1851 but it was brief.

In 1859, two years before the Civil War and a decade after the first convention of Christians in which the American Christian Missionary Society was born, a preacher named L. L. Pinkerton was preaching in a church in Midway, KY. Pinkerton was baptized by Alexander Campbell in 1830, at the age of 18. He studied to become a medical doctor but eight years later, he decided to preach full-time. He moved from OH to KY, to the Midway congregation. Pinkerton was a “radical” from other perspectives. He was strongly in favor of temperance as well as being an abolitionist. He also started the Female Orphanage School which is now Midway College which has the melodeon on display even today, that split the churches of Christ beginning in that small town of Midway, KY.

The singing at the Midway Church got to be so bad, in the words of Pinkerton that it would “scare even the rats from worship” (North, 222). So, people began gathering at the church on Saturday night to practice songs for the next morning. Someone brought in a melodeon in order to hit the right pitch. Before long, a woman was actually playing the melodeon while they were singing. People believed their singing was significantly improved. Here is a fallacy of the instrumental music argument: instruments do not *help* poor singing. Instruments *cover up* poor singing and eventually discourages many people from singing at all. Be that as it may, it was reasoned that if instruments could be used on Saturday night, then they could be used Sunday morning in worship.

Not only would Pinkerton lead the way in sowing discord among brethren relative to the instrumental music but he also drank deeply from the well of German biblical criticism, which we will study in a future lesson, and he came to accept “open membership” (immersion is not necessary to be saved nor to be a member of the church) and rejected the inspiration of the Scriptures.

Well, not everyone approved of the melodeon. One of the elders of the church helped a slave named Reuben through a church house window who passed the melodeon through the window and the elder took it home with him. But, another melodeon was brought in and it split the church. Mechanical instruments of music split the church in a way that the missionary society did not because if you are conscientiously opposed to instruments, you simply cannot worship with them. You might be against societies but that is a matter of the church finances, and potentially of church autonomy, but you could still worship at a church that supported societies (as far as worship is concerned). But you cannot worship *with* instruments if your conscience says they are sinful. The church at Midway, KY is the first church in the restoration movement, on record, to use instruments of music in worship.

As we all know, the Civil War started up in 1861 and that set the instrumental music issue on the back-burner. The missionary society would have also, likely, been on the back-burner if the society had not brought the Civil War into church discussions with their pro-Union resolutions. But the underlying issue was not the society nor the instrument but the matter of biblical authority. The issue revolved around the question of biblical silence. One viewpoint that goes back to Martin Luther, was that biblical silence grants liberty. The NT is silent on how to do mission work and it is silent on mechanical instruments of music. Therefore, one can do both. The other viewpoint, consistent with Ulrich Zwingli, is that one can do no more than what is authorized in Scripture. Therefore, the society and the instrument are both unbiblical.

#### POST-CIVIL WAR:

As we saw with the missionary society, brethren lined up on both sides of the issue. David Lipscomb, who restarted *The Gospel Advocate* after a hiatus of a few years because of the Civil War, and Benjamin Franklin in the *American Christian Review* were against the instrument. That is consistent with their opposition to the missionary society.

*The Christian Standard*, which we saw last week was started with the assistance of James Garfield with Isaac Errett of Detroit as its editor (although by then, Errett had moved to Cincinnati to publish the magazine), lined up on the side of the instrument and the society. Now, they took a “non-committal” position on the instrument. Errett said he was personally opposed to the instrument but did not see it as an issue and would not split the church over it.

Then there was an inconsistent middle ground. In 1869, JW McGarvey and Moses Lard and a few others began a journal called *The Apostolic Times*. In this magazine, the editors were *against* the instrument of music but *in favor* of the missionary society. There were only a few

preachers who did not see the inconsistency of being in favor of one but not the other so *The Apostolic Times* died within a year.

Let me introduce another magazine and its editor because he will eventually become a very influential voice in this controversy. James H. Garrison started a magazine called *Christian-Evangelist* and wound up preaching in St. Louis in 1882. Lipscomb, Errett, and Garrison would become the leading voices in the discussion over the matter of biblical authority, with the instrument and the missionary society being the “test cases.”

James Harvey Garrison was born in 1842 in Ozark, MO. His parents were Baptists and moved to SW MO from east TN. In the Civil War, Garrison fought with the Union forces. After the war, while in college, he became a Christian. He began preaching in IL as an associate minister; the preacher had taught at the college where Garrison attended. The preacher was editing a paper called *The Gospel Echo* and Garrison served as co-editor of the paper and eventually became editor. He then moved the paper to St. Louis where he changed its name to *The Christian* and soon merged it with another paper called *The Evangelist* to make the *Christian-Evangelist*. Garrison was in favor of missionary societies and the instrument as well as many forms of German higher criticism. That would put him to the left of Isaac Errett and *The Christian Standard*. Garrison would eventually push for unity among all so-called Christians with the pursuit of truth decidedly in the background. His son will go even further to the left in his doctrinal convictions.

An extended discussion occurred on instrumental music between JW McGarvey and A. S. Hayden, the president of the Western Reserve Eclectic Institute where James Garfield was a student and president. McGarvey was against the instrument and Hayden argued on the basis of expediency that it was allowable. As early as 1864, five years after its introduction, Moses Lard in his own magazine *Lard's Quarterly* was suggesting that one could not worship with those who insisted on using the instrument. He wrote (West, I:316-317):

1. Preachers should resolve not to hold meetings where the instruments were used.
2. Christians who were moving should not join a church that was using the instrument.
3. Brethren should be gentle and kind.
4. If necessary, those against the instrument should withdraw and start another congregation.

At the time Lard wrote this, he was ahead of his time. The introduction of the instrument was slow in coming and the division was actually slow in forming. Christians were not as quick to draw lines of fellowship as Moses Lard was.

#### OPEN MEMBERSHIP:

In 1861, we have another issue along the same lines as the previous two hot-button issues we have discussed. An article appeared in both the *Millennial Harbinger* and *The American Christian Review* titled “Communion with the Sects.” At issue was how Christians should relate to those in Protestantism, particularly those who were seemingly pious but not immersed for the forgiveness of sins. Richard Hawley, of Detroit, had come to denouncing “Phariseeism” in the church and the “exclusiveness” in the church relative to denominations. Isaac Errett wrote: “We are compelled, therefore, to recognize as Christians many who have been in error on baptism, but who in the *spirit* of obedience are Christians indeed” (West, I:347).

The controversy, at that time, only lasted for a couple of years but it will return in force. Could a pious man, who had not been immersed, be saved eternally? That was the question now facing the brotherhood. Can a man be a Christian without being immersed? A related

question came to be: “Does the church have the right to refuse the Lord’s Supper to the unimmersed?”

Isaac Errett agreed that no man was a Christian in NT times without immersion, but, he argued, we live in different times, times when we are compelled to admit that the good, pious men in all denominations are Christians.

#### DAVID LIPSCOMB:

As we move into the late 1800s, let me give you some information on David Lipscomb and Isaac Errett as they are two of the strongest voices during these decades, Lipscomb, a strong proponent of the restoration plea through the pages of *The Gospel Advocate*, Errett, a similarly strong proponent of freedom to do as you please...

First, Errett... Errett’s dad was from Ireland, a member of the Scotch Baptist church that was under the influence of John Glas and Robert Sandeman. It was that Henry Errett who wrote the pamphlet, once he immigrated to the US, on baptism as immersion for the forgiveness of sins that influenced Alexander Campbell and Walter Scott on this subject. Isaac was born in 1820 and immersed in 1832. Seven years later, he became the regular minister for their congregation. In 1844, he moved to Lisbon, OH.

Errett was a supporter of the American Christian Missionary Society when it was first proposed in 1849 and served as the society’s secretary from 1857-1860. He was a coeditor of the *Millennial Harbinger* for several years. In late 1862, Errett moved to Detroit to preach for the Jefferson Ave and Beaubien Street Church. He spent 10 years in Detroit and it was here that he came to allow himself to be called “reverend.” He had been laying the groundwork for the concept of a one-man “pastor” system in the church through the pages of the *Millennial Harbinger*.

Errett also accepted a position at the Western Reserve Eclectic Institute in Hiram, OH and became editor, as I have mentioned, of the newly founded *Christian Standard* magazine. The *Christian Standard* was to the left of both the *Gospel Advocate* and the *American Christian Review*. The *Standard* was decidedly pro-Union after the Civil War. Errett would die in OH in 1888.

Now, Lipscomb... David Lipscomb was born in TN and around the time he was born, his parents left the Baptist Church under the influence of Campbell’s restoration message. When Lipscomb was three years old, his parents moved to IL so they could set their slaves free. When Lipscomb was 15 years old, he returned to TN to study at Franklin College under Tolbert Fanning.

I have mentioned that David Lipscomb preached against the Christians’ participation in war during the Civil War. He also wrote a book called *Civil Government: Its Origin, Mission and Destiny and the Christian’s Relationship to It*, which I have in my library. Lipscomb was such an extreme pacifist that he did not believe Christians could have anything to do with the civil government except pay taxes, including not being a public school teacher. The kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world were two separate institutions. Lipscomb’s views would hold strong sway in the churches of Christ until WWI and be practically in a minority by the time we get to WWII.

Although Campbell read everything Alexander Campbell wrote, his most immediate influence was Tolbert Fanning. Fanning had started the *Gospel Advocate* in 1855 with William Lipscomb but it came to a halt during the Civil War. After the war, in 1866, when Fanning restarted the *Advocate*, he brought David Lipscomb on board as co-editor. David was the

younger brother of William. He will eventually edit the *Gospel Advocate* for 46 years and wield considerable influence in the brotherhood, especially among conservatives, and especially in the south.

Lipscomb was opposed to the missionary society and instrumental music in worship and, as we will study soon, German higher criticism. When German higher criticism invades the church via the Disciples Divinity School at the University of Chicago and the disciples' spokesman for liberal theology, J. H. Garrison's son, Dr. Winfred E. Garrison, Lipscomb would strenuously oppose that theology through the pages of the *Advocate* while JW McGarvey would do the same through the *Christian Standard*.

In 1891, with the aid of James A. Harding, Lipscomb will begin a school in Nashville called the Nashville Bible School. He put a lot of time, energy, and his own money, including land, into the NBS and when he passed away in 1917, the board quickly renamed the school David Lipscomb College. So loving was Lipscomb that when a cholera epidemic hit Nashville in 1873, Lipscomb stayed in Nashville ministering among the sick, especially among the black population. Lipscomb also wrote several other books besides *Civil Government* including a Q & A. He passed away at the age of 86 in November of 1917.

Following the Civil War, the restoration movement will find itself splitting over the matter of Bible authority, epitomized primarily in the two issues of the missionary society and the instrumental music question.

Next week: "A Denomination Forms Out of the Restoration Movement"