

Let's Go Deeper...

Wednesday, April 13, 2016

Our theme this month in our 200th anniversary celebration is music. With the joint worship service including area Disciples of Christ, Christian Churches, and Churches of Christ just a month off, I've been pondering the irony whereby music has caused so much *disharmony* in the Campbell-Stone movement, not to mention the wider church. Across the pews (and padded auditorium-style chairs) of the three branches of our movement, there are classical music aficionados, praise band enthusiasts, and brothers and sisters who firmly believe neither organs, pianos, guitars or drums have a place in a holy place—the *a cappella* Churches of Christ.

Try preparing a worship service “uniting” all three styles and modes of “lifting a joyful noise unto the Lord.” As one of my parishioners in Phoenix said of our efforts at blended worship, “There is something for everyone *not* to like.”

I first learned of the discordant role of musical instruments in our history while serving the Carthage (TN) Christian Church as a Vanderbilt Divinity School student in the early eighties.

In the early forties, the church split in two over the actions of a visiting evangelist at the annual revival. The Baptist and Methodist ministers in town were frequent attendees of the

Christian Church's revivals back then and were often invited to participate. In 1943, however, the visiting evangelist, with the newly called pastor's backing, flatly refused to include the neighboring ministers. When asked why, he answered, “I will not call on sectarian preachers to lead in prayer at a Christian worship service.” As he explained it, the Methodist

preacher had never been immersed and the Baptist preacher wrapped himself in the “sectarian” title of Baptist as opposed to the “scripturally ordained” one of Christian. Bottom line: no unimmersed, “sectarian” ministers would be invited to participate in the revival. Take it or leave it.

Disagreement led to division; one church became two. Those who supported the views espoused by the visiting evangelist and minister became the Carthage Church of Christ. Those who urged the inclusion of neighboring pastors became the Carthage Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Soon after the split, the Christian Church congregation purchased a piano for the sanctuary. Previous to that time, the congregation had sung all their music *a cappella* because the more conservative members of the church roundly denounced “sectarians'” use of instrumental music in worship, claiming the New Testament made no mention of pianos and thus implicitly prohibiting them. Word of the



Disciples' purchase of a piano only served to heighten the denunciations from the disaffected members. An article was published in the regional Church of Christ newsletter lambasting the "liberal" faction of the church for their admittance of "sectarians" to pray and for their purchase of a piano. The article was entitled "The Church at Carthage, TN, Goes Digressive." The rift was sealed.

During that painful period, a young woman whose family had left the church approached Mr. Read (Alexander Campbell Read, Sr.), long-time elder of the Disciples congregation, with a question. The woman was engaged to be married and wanted to know if it would be possible for her to be married in the sanctuary. Mr. Read, in the gentle way which was his, nodded his head slowly, and in his deep, slow drawl, said, "Of course, daughter. The Lord's House is always open to you."

Whereupon she asked, "Could the piano be played at my wedding?"

"Of course, daughter," the beloved Elder responded, "but the piano we purchased is on order and hasn't arrived yet so I'll have some of the men from the church move the piano from our house to the sanctuary in time for your wedding."

The girl's wedding was held in the Carthage Christian Church. Members of the Carthage Church of Christ and Carthage Christian Church sat side-by-side in the pews witnessing the vows. Piano music added to the ceremony.

After the wedding, the bride, the groom, her family, and the Church of Christ folks returned to the building down the street where they continued worshipping God with a capella singing apart from liberal sectarians and unaided by non-scriptural things such as pianos.

Me? I'll sing pretty much anything to pretty much any accompaniment and in pretty much any style. Below is one of my favorite hymns. It's in the Chalice Hymnal #7. Ponder Fred Pratt's lyrics. Then enter the link below into your browser and listen. A joyous music month to you!

*When in our music God is glorified,
and adoration leaves no room for pride,
it is as though the whole creation cried Alleluia!*

*How often, making music, we have found
a new dimension in the world of sound,
as worship moved us to a more profound Alleluia!*

*So has the Church, in liturgy and song,
in faith and love, through centuries of wrong,
borne witness to the truth in every tongue, Alleluia!*

*And did not Jesus sing a psalm that night
when utmost evil strove against the Light?
Then let us sing, for whom he won the fight, Alleluia!*

*Let every instrument be tuned for praise!
Let all rejoice who have a voice to raise!
And may God give us faith to sing always Alleluia! Amen.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wda0y6Aqi38>

