

CAUSES OF DIGRESSION

GUY N. WOODS

Shortly before the turn of the present century, a movement originated in the church of Christ that resulted in what is commonly known as The Christian Church. The idea is quite generally widespread that the cause of this schism and resultant division was Instrumental music in the worship and societies in the work of the church. Technically speaking, this is incorrect. True, these were major differences between those who adhered to the original pattern of things and those who went out from us: yet Instrumental music and the societies were rather effects than causes.

Dr. A. W. Fortune, some time professor of the College of The Bible, and "Pastor" of the "Central Christian Church," of Lexington, Kentucky, in his book, "The Disciples in Kentucky," sets forth as grounds for the division, the following: "The controversies through which the Disciples have passed from the beginning to the present time have been the result of two different interpretations of their mission. There have been those who believed it is the Spirit of the New Testament church that should be restored and in our method of working the church must adapt itself to changing conditions. There have been those who regarded the New Testament church as a fixed pattern for all time, and our business is to hold rigidly to that pattern regardless of consequences." Because of

these two attitudes, conflicts were inevitable" (Page 383).

This, we believe, is a fair and impartial statement of the divergence of the views that obtained then, and are now characteristic of the two groups. Because of these differences in attitude, it was, as Dr. Fortune suggests, inevitable that division should come; and it came shortly before the turn of the present century. Those who had worked and worshipped together in the effort to plant again the Cause of Primitive Christianity in a land torn by division and cursed by denominationalism, divided among themselves, and the result was that another denomination came into existence! Ironically enough, those whose avowed mission in life was the utter destruction of all denominationalism, became but another denomination, and thus built again the things they had once destroyed! Today, the Christian Church admits its denominational status, and glories in the fact!

Instrumental music and the societies were simply symptoms of the disease that lurked unseen; outward manifestations of an inward attitude wholly foreign to that which had characterized the Restoration movement in its inception. Nor did this difference in attitude originate with this movement. It is the same as that which characterized the Restoration movement in its inception.

It is the same as that which occasioned the famous controversy between Luther and Zwingli — whether we are at liberty to do anything not expressly forbidden, as Luther contended, or are bound by what is written and must therefore do nothing for which there is not a "thus saith the Lord," or an approved apostolic precedent, as Zwingli contended. This, too, is the point of issue between those who insist that the Bible and the Bible alone is a sufficient rule of faith and practice, and those who consider it a book of principles only, and therefore to be made adaptable to changing times and conditions. The former have always repudiated creeds, confessions of faith and church manuals, while the latter have not hesitated to advocate them, indeed, to urge them as legitimate instruments to adapt the truth to present day conditions. This is the door through which instrumental music, missionary societies, creeds, infant baptism, sprinkling and pouring as substitutes for baptism, and many other things admittedly not taught in the New Testament, were brought in. While all have not been as frank as Mr. Beecher, the eminent denominational preacher of an earlier generation, who said that he practiced infant baptism for the same reason that he used an ox yoke — he had tried them and both worked — it is yet a fact that this is the real reason why so many things unauthorized by the Scriptures are practiced without question, today.

Such an attitude is, of course, wholly foreign to that which characterized those who launched the restoration movement. The Pioneers of the faith were determined to do nothing for which there is no expressed command, or approved precedent; and they were willing to speak only when the Scriptures speak and to remain silent when the Scriptures are silent. So long as these principles were adhered to, unity prevailed, and the Cause of Primitive Christianity spread with a rapidity equaled only by that of the apostolic age. The Christian Church today is, therefore, a total apostasy from the teaching of Campbell, Stone, Scott and others. This, we believe, will not be seriously questioned by those who belong to that institution. Certainly, they who boast of their denominational status will not insist on maintaining harmonious views with a man who made a daily paper in New Orleans publish a correction of a former statement in which he was declared to be the "head and founder of a great denomination," as Mr. Campbell did. Said Mr. Campbell: "You do me too much honor — I have always repudiated all human names and heads for the people of the Lord." Contrast this with the following statement from "Dr. Harwood Miller," recently installed as "permanent pastor" of the National City Christian

Church: "Denominations and sects are not wholly or even largely the product of human pride and prejudice and unbrotherliness — a thing entirely wrong could not long endure by the devotion of men — it is unthinkable to condemn all sectarianism as sinful."

The real cause of division in the body of Christ was therefore, an abandonment of the principles that had hitherto motivated us. Those who no longer looked upon the New Testament as an all-sufficient guide and rule of faith and practice did not scruple to demand things unauthorized therein; while those who clung tenaciously to the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures, as stoutly resisted them; and division was, therefore, inevitable. This, indeed, has been the cause of all departures since the apostolic age. Those who regard the Bible as a complete revelation for all time cannot, in conscience add to, or take from, its teaching, in the smallest particular; while those who view it only as a mass of raw principles to be worked into shape to fit changing conditions, are not restrained by the injunctions it contains against adding to or taking from the Word.

This fact is remarkably illustrated in the man who was responsible for first introducing an instrument of music into the church of Christ. He was L. L. Pinkerton, a preacher of Midway, Kentucky. Said Dr. Fortune, "Dr. L. L. Pinkerton is credited by some with having been the first to make this departure, when he introduced a melodeon in the worship of the church at Midway. The article on 'Churches of Christ' in Religious Bodies, 1926, makes that the beginning of the controversy. This statement is made: 'The question as to the use of instrumental music of the church became an issue as early as 1859, when a melodeon was placed in the church at Midway, Ky.'" ("Disciples in Kentucky," page 372, 373). The attitude of this man, (on whom rests the obloquy of corrupting the worship of God) toward the Scriptures, will appear from the following: In 1869 Pinkerton and Shackelford began the publication of the *Independent Monthly*. In an article on "Bible Inspiration," he denied the theory of plenary inspiration, and criticised Milligan's "Reason and Revelation," and said that young preachers who were taught that the ninth verse of the one hundred and thirty-seventh Psalm was inspired would "perpetrate a great many follies in his name." In an article on "No Immersion — No membership in a church of the Restoration," he took the position that while he would only teach and practice immersion, he would be willing to let a man settle the question of baptism for himself. He said he would not thrust this translation of a Greek word between a man's conscience and his God!

We have, we think, abundantly sustained our thesis in this introductory paper that the Christian Church defection grew out of a difference in attitude toward the Scriptures. This being true, instrumental music and the societies, plus a hundred more recent innovations, were perfectly natural developments, logically to be expected. Unity will therefore never be realized until we come to see, eye to eye, on the value of the Sacred Scriptures. The love feasts thus far characteristic of the Murch-Witty affair will never accomplish that end. We suggest to Brother Witty that he preach a few sermons in the unity meetings on the Proper Division of the Word, The All-Sufficiency of the Scriptures, and The Danger of Adding to, or Taking from, the Word of God, and if he can convert our erstwhile brethren of the Christian Church on these vital themes he will have made real progress toward Unity.

In our study thus far on this subject we have shown the movement which originated in the Church of Christ shortly before the beginning of the Twentieth Century, and resulting in what is commonly known as the Christian Church, developed out of a radical change in attitude toward the scriptures on the part of those who went out. As a result of this change in attitude, this institution has abandoned the positions formerly characteristic of the church, and is now completely apostatized from the principles which formerly motivated us. It can no longer claim, with truth, to be a part of the Restoration movement. The denominations have taken due notice of this fact, and have readily accepted the Christian Church as a sister denomination. Instead of resenting this attitude on the part of the older denominations, the Christian Church has accepted the denominational status, and glories in the fact. Said Mr. A.H. Newman, Baptist, in his Manual of Church History, "There is less difference today between the progressive Disciples and the Baptists than there was between Alexander Campbell and the Baptists of 1830" (Vol. 2, page 701). It is an acknowledged fact that in the average community the Christian Church has more in common with Baptist, Methodist, and other denominational churches than with the churches of Christ!

This fact, were there no others, indicates the extent of the apostasy of our erstwhile brethren of the Christian Church. The Restoration movement was planted in the soil of controversy, and watered by debates that made history. It grew to be a mighty tree where once denominational plants which the heavenly Father did not plant, thrived without molestation. We have come to our present proud position as the result of an unceasing warfare against every doctrine and institution of man.

To renounce these methods and be at peace with those whom we formerly opposed is utterly to abandon the principles that have hitherto motivated us. This, precisely, is what the Christian Church has done. True, they still hold to the forms of teaching formerly characteristic of them; but only in form; in practice they have utterly renounced them. It is common today for Christian Churches to enter into union efforts of Methodists, Presbyterians and others who not only repudiate the Plan of Salvation set forth in the New Testament; but who, in addition, practice sprinkling and pouring as acceptable substitutes for baptism. The Restoration movement was launched by men who formerly practiced sprinkling and pouring themselves, and one of their earliest efforts at reformation was the repudiation of such as wholly foreign to New Testament teaching. It follows therefore, that Christian Churches who enter such efforts do so with the conviction that those with whom they thus engage, are not even Christians because they have not obeyed the gospel; or else they no longer consider it essential to follow New Testament teaching regarding what constitutes baptism, or what sinners must do in order to be saved.

We are prepared to show that Christian Churches have moved so far from the position they held, that they now have more in common with denominationalism than with us; they are influenced more by Catholicism than by the Bible! It will not be denied by members of the Christian Church that its colleges and universities are shot through and through with modernism and infidelity of the rankest form. Bethany University, founded by A. Campbell for the express purpose of disseminating knowledge of the Sacred Scriptures, and creating faith in them, is now in the hands of a group of men who scoff at the inspiration of the Scriptures and ridicule the claims of those of us who believe it to be the Word of God. A Butler University professor is quoted as having said recently: "You may read McGarvey as a good sermonizer, but you know we are a long way from his ideas of inspiration of the Scriptures." This statement was made by a professor to a class of young Christian preachers! Denominational schools among the Baptists and Methodists have likewise become hotbeds of skepticism and infidelity. With whom then, do the Christian Churches have more in common? With us, or with the denominations?

Not infrequently, Christian Churches observe "The Lord's Supper," on Thursday evening. This has long been a custom of the denominational churches. The Church of Christ however, has always adhered to the apostolic custom of meeting on the first day of the week and observing the

(Continued on page 5)

Causes of Digression — Con't.

supper at that time, following the example of the apostles (I Cor. 16:2; Acts 20:7). With whom then, do the Christian Churches conform in their practice? Catholics and others observe special days at frequent intervals through the year, such as Easter, Lent, etc. Such too, is a common practice of Christian Churches resort to the observance of such, whence comes their authority? Certainly not from the Scriptures. The observance of these special days originated in Catholicism. In observing them it follows that the Christian Church is influenced more by Catholicism than by the Bible!

Instrumental music was first introduced into so-called Christian worship in 670 A.D. by a dignitary of the Catholic Church. Protestantism adopted this relic of Catholicism; and, the Christian Church fell in line and did likewise. Its practice is unauthorized in worship. Jesus nowhere authorized it, no apostle ever commanded it, no New Testament writer ever sanctioned it, no apostolic church ever practiced it! To use it then, one looks not to Christ for authority but to the church of Rome! This, precisely, is what the Christian Church does; and demonstrates conclusively the charge earlier made in this series that the Christian Church is influenced more by Catholicism and denominationalism than by the Bible.

It is a well-nigh universal practice of denominational churches to affix to the names of their preachers titles such as Reverend, Doctor, Pastor, etc. etc. It is unnecessary to point out here that such titles are never used in such fashion in the Scriptures. Yet, Christian preachers do not hesitate to ape their denominational brethren in this manner, and follow uniformly the custom of the world. In doing so, whose pattern do they follow? The scriptures or denominationalism?

While we have presented only a small number of the things Christian Churches have in common with the older denominations among whom she has taken her place, we have presented enough to show her utter apostasy from the positions formerly characteristic of her; and have sustained our thesis that she is influenced more by denominationalism and Catholicism than by the Scriptures. The Christian Church no longer adheres to the New Testament as her rule of faith and practice! In teaching, organization and practice, she has moved away from the New Testament arrangement. She no longer fights the Cause of Primitive Christianity; she has abandoned the faith of the fathers. Many of her preachers do not even know what the plan of salvation is! In a discussion with one of them

some time ago, he was unable to tell this writer what the Bible says *put one into Christ!*

Our erstwhile brethren of the Christian Church have not hesitated to attach to themselves the appellation "Progressive," in an effort to justify their departure from the things written; and have stigmatized all those who refuse their innovations as "Non-progressive."

While they intend that some stigma shall attach to the word "Non-progressive," intending by it to suggest that those whose position remains the same as formerly are old-fashioned and outmoded and out of step with the times, there is yet a certain fitness about it that is not at all distasteful; it is, indeed, a correct designation of those who refuse to go beyond that which is written. There are some things in which it is exceeding dangerous to be "progressive," one of which to progress beyond that which is written.

Men frequently condemn themselves out of their own mouths; and no better illustration of that fact can be found than in the penchant the Digressives have for styling themselves the "Progressive" ones. In I John 9, we are admonished that "whoso goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ hath not God." It is a settled fact that one cannot practice instrumental music in Christian worship by the authority of Christ, because Christ nowhere authorizes it. To use it at all then, is to go beyond His teaching. Of those who thus do, John says, "They have not God." More, we are commanded to do religiously, only such things as can be done "in the name of the Lord" (Col. 3:17). To do a thing in the name of the Lord is, of course, to do it by His authority. But, as we have already pointed out, Christ has nowhere given us permission to use instrumental music in Christian worship. It follows therefore, that those who use it, do so without the authority of Christ, hence advance beyond that which is written," and John says those who do so "Have not God." The word "onward," in the sentence under consideration, "Whoso goeth *onward* and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God," is from the Greek word "Proagoo," which, in turn, is the parent word of such English words as "progress," "progressive," "progression!" Literally, John said, "Whosoever becometh *progressive* and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God." We are inclined to think, therefore, that this is a correct method of distinguishing between those who use instrumental music and those who do not! We are by no means adverse to having this charge brought against us by our erstwhile brethren. In fact, we gladly accept the charge! We are indeed *non-progressive* in all of those matters requiring one to go beyond that which is written! Yes, there are

some things in which it is exceedingly dangerous to be *progressive*.

Let the reader carefully consider the following passages and then decide whether it is safe to "progress" beyond that which is written, as must be done by all who use instrumental music in Christian worship: "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you" (Deut. 4:2). "Add thou not unto His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar" (Prov. 30:6). "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev. 22:17-18).

Be it remembered that instrumental music in Christian worship can be used only by "adding to" that which is written; by progressing beyond that which is found in the book. Is it then a mark of faithfulness to be "progressive?" As a matter of fact, progression in such matters imply equals Digression; and this, precisely, is what our brethren of the Christian Church have done. Having progressed beyond that which is written, they are now "Digressives," and will continue thus until they repudiate their unscriptural practices, and return to the "Old Paths." We repeat: There are some things in which it is best to be "non-progressive!"

An Old, Old Story-Repeated — Con't.

held a meeting in Nashville, Tennessee for the "digressive" church. Some of David Lipscomb's friends urgently entreated him to attend the meeting, declaring that Sweeney preached "the old Jerusalem gospel" with power and conviction. To which Lipscomb responded (we paraphrase from memory, not having the old *Gospel Advocate* before us as we write), "I have not a doubt in the world that Brother Sweeney believes the ancient gospel, and preaches it with great power. I have never charged otherwise. But it is in his *application* of those ancient truths that I think he falls short. Here is the crucial test. Brother Sweeney does not APPLY the truth that he preaches."

It is not enough to *preach* the ancient gospel; there must be an *application* of it both in the life of congregations and in the life of the individual.

F.Y.T

GOD'S MAN IN GOD'S WORLD

GORDON J. PENNOCK

When astronauts, William Anders, James Lovell Jr. and Frank Borman, read the first eight verses of the first chapter of Genesis, while orbiting the moon more than 200,000 miles away, we received the thrill of a life-time. Of course, the circumstance was not the only factor enjoyed. It was truly gratifying to hear these three courageous and confident men thus honoring God as the Creator of all things, while they themselves were engaged in the greatest scientific and technological operation of our time. Under the prevailing circumstances, the simple words: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," seemed most appropriate, and doubtlessly, became more meaningful to them, as it did to those of us who listened.

Thoughtful men are always overwhelmed with a sense of littleness and insignificance whenever they ponder the vastness, majesty and mystery of the cosmos. In the long ago, David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote:

"When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers,

The moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;

What is man, that thou art mindful of him?

And the Son of man, that thou visitest him?"

Psalm 8:3,4

Yet, when they compare themselves with other forms of life, they readily recognize their superlativeness and superiority. In this same Psalm, the writer responds to his own question, "What is man?" by declaring:

"For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels,

And hast crowned him with glory and honor.

Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands;

Thou hast put all things under his feet.

All sheep and oxen,

Yea, and the beasts of the field;

The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea,

And whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas."

Psalm 8:5-8

Man's uniqueness lies in the fact that he was created *inferior* to Deity, yet *superior* to the rest of creation. It has been accurately said that "man is not an organism; he is an intelligence served by

(Continued on Page 7)