

**ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 115:**

**“THE ADVENTIST IDENTITY CRISIS:**

**A LOOK AT WORSHIP MUSIC”**

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The last newsletter by Pastor Lloyd Grolimund on “Fire in the Church,” highlighted how the Neo-Pentecostal worship style with rock music, drama, dancing, speaking in tongues, and healing, is finding its way into an increasing number of Adventist churches in Australia. The problem is not limited to Australia. Subscribers from different parts of the world have replied by sharing their concerns about the influence of Pentecostalism in their local churches.

Rolf Baier, a Chilean who translated the last newsletter into Spanish, reports that the influence of Neo-Pentecostalism is felt even in South American. He writes: “Here the book *Evangelism by Fire* by Reinnhard Bonnke, a German Pentecostal pastor from Africa, has been freely distributed to Adventist elders and pastors in my Conference . . . with what future outcome? Only God knows . . .” You can access Baier’s Spanish translation of “Fire in the Church” at my website: [www.biblicalperspectives.com](http://www.biblicalperspectives.com). Just click on the NEWSLETTERS button, and you will see immediately the Spanish version listed as “Fire in the Church in Spanish.”

The adoption of Pentecostal styles of worship is a major contributing factor to the crisis of Adventist identity. An increasing number of Adventists lament that they can no longer attend their local church because they are offended by the new worship style with beat music and drama. This crisis is deeply felt in different ways in different countries. Last October 2003 I was invited to speak in several churches in Sweden and Norway. During the 10 days I spent in these two countries, I was frequently reminded that our believers are facing a crisis of Adventist identity, because an increasing number of them are adopting the worship style and the lifestyle of other Christians. Upon my arrival in Stockholm, Bobby Sjolander, the pastor of our Ekebyholm Junior College Church in Sweden, specifically asked me to speak on “The Crisis of Adventist Identity in the 21st Century.”

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The same was true few days ago, on Tuesday, June 8, 2004, when I was asked to speak at a meeting of all the pastors and elders attending the South England Campmeeting, held near Bristol, England. This was the largest campmeeting in Europe, with over 3000 attending during the week and 5000 on the weekend. The title of my PowerPoint presentation given to the pastors and elders was, "The Crisis of Adventist Identity." The response was very encouraging, as several pastors and elders supplied me blank CDs to burn a copy of the PowerPoint lecture for their personal use.

In my talk I suggested that our Adventist identity has three major components: theological, existential, and liturgical, that is to say, our doctrines, lifestyle, and worship. What we believe, how we live, and how we worship, has traditionally defined our identity. We have seen ourselves as a *remnant people* called to live a temperate and holy lifestyle, in order to proclaim the final message of warning (three angel messages) to mankind.

### **Theological Challenges**

In recent times each of these three components of our Adventist identity have come under severe attack. In this newsletter I will focus primarily on the worship music, because it is the most critical and controversial aspect of our Adventist identity. By way of introduction, I will discuss briefly the theological and lifestyle challenges that are eroding our Adventist identity.

Theologically, several of our distinctive Adventist beliefs have been questioned or even challenged. The latest issues of *REFLECTIONS* (January to May, 2004), the official newsletter of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, offer a perceptive analysis of the theological challenges posed by both liberal and conservative Adventists. Since the focus of this newsletter is the challenge of worship music to our Adventist identity, only a brief mention will be made of a few theological and lifestyle influences which are weakening our Adventist identity.

*Creation.* "During approximately the last thirty years," writes *REFLECTIONS*, "a small number of Adventists in academic circles has been raising questions concerning the credibility of our position on creation based on the scientific evidence gathered by evolutionists. . . . Hence the two main options offered to the church by these scholars and theologians are theistic evolution or agnosticism in regard to origins" (January pp. 3-4). Simply

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stated, some Adventist science teachers and theologians maintain that God used evolution as the method of creation, while others simply say that we do not know how life began on this planet.

To question or even reject the biblical doctrine of creation in six days, means to undermine the credibility of such fundamental Adventist beliefs like the Sabbath and the Incarnation. If God did not create this world in six days, then God could hardly have instituted the seventh day Sabbath to celebrate the completion of His creation in six days. Similarly, if God did not enter into *human time at creation* to bring human and subhuman life into existence, then there was no reason for Him to enter into *human flesh at the incarnation*, to redeem and restore His creatures to an original perfection that never existed.

*The Sabbath.* In recent years the Sabbath has been attacked by several former Adventist Bible teachers and pastors. These men have written numerous books and articles which argue that the Sabbath is an old covenant institution, given to the Jews, nailed to the Cross, and consequently no longer binding upon us Christian today. Regretfully, this so-called “New Covenant Theology,” has influenced thousands of Adventists to leave the church.

During the past five years I have spent countless hours exposing the flaws of the so-called New Covenant Theology. My book *The Sabbath Under Crossfire*, is largely the outgrowth of the Sabbath discussions with our former brethren. It is hard to believe that even former Sabbatharians are questioning the global scope of the Sabbath, when Jesus stated unequivocally that “The Sabbath was made for man” (Mark 2:27), not just for the Jews. In fact Jesus went out of His way to clarify the divine intent of the Sabbath by proclaiming the day to be a time to show mercy (Matt 12:7), “to do good” (Matt 12:12), “to save life” (Mark 3:4), and to liberate people from physical and spiritual burdens (Luke 13:12, 16). All the Sabbath pronouncements of Jesus clearly indicate that Christ wanted to clarify the Sabbath, not nullify it.

But the Sabbath is attacked today not only theologically, but also existentially by an increasing number of Adventists who are adopting the Sundaykeeping mentality. This consists in reducing the Sabbath to an hour of church attendance. When the divine service is over, the Sabbath is over. They put back their Sabbath clothes in the closet, close the closet and close the Sabbath. They spend the rest of the day eating out at a restaurant, shopping at the mall, or visiting places of entertainment.

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By attacking the Sabbath from outside and inside the church, Satan is undermining our Adventist identity, because the day serves as a constant reminder of our identity and mission. A Jewish scholar wrote: “The Sabbath has preserved the Jews more than the Jews have preserved the Sabbath.” I believe that the same is true for our Adventist church. The Sabbath can help us preserve our Adventist identity, by reminding us that to observe a HOLY DAY means to accept the challenge to be a HOLY PEOPLE in a secularly minded and perverse generation.

*The Role of Ellen White.* It is impossible to estimate how many Adventists have left the church in recent years over the question of the prophetic role of Ellen White. Hardly a week goes by without receiving email messages from distressed Adventists on the verge of leaving the church after reading the attacks against Ellen White, which are posted in countless websites. There is no question that the challenge to the prophetic role of Ellen White is weakening in a significant way the Adventist identity.

What distresses some fellow believers is the discovery that their mental image of Ellen White as a prophet who wrote accurately under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, cannot be reconciled with some inaccuracies found in her writings. This is a serious problem that our church needs to address with urgency, not by explaining away the inaccuracies of Ellen White’s writings, but by helping our members to understand the limitations of the prophetic gift manifested in the Bible and Ellen White’s writings. I have addressed this question in Endtime Issues Numbers 88 and 89. I have shown that Ellen White recognized her limitations and invited competent scholars to make the necessary corrections to the 1911 edition of *The Great Controversy*.

The prophetic gift does not make the prophet an authority on history, science, or doctrinal interpretations. Rather the gift of prophecy empowers the prophet to speak to church members “for their upbuilding and encouragement and consolation” (1 Cor 14:3). We are told that the messages of the prophets have to be tested and evaluated to ensure that truth is not mixed with error (1 Thess 5:20-21; 1 Cor 14:29).

During the 70 years of her prophetic ministry Ellen White has given ample evidence of possessing the prophetic gift. She delivered thousands of messages for the encouragement, consolation, reproof, and the upbuilding of the church. Her messages still meet the spiritual needs of our souls and can help us grow unto the stature of our Lord. Our Adventist church would not be

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today a worldwide movement, had it not been for the prophetic vision of Ellen White, who helped define our message and mission.

*Other Doctrines.* There are several other doctrines which are questioned by some Adventists today. They include the investigative judgment, the concept of the remnant, the traditional interpretation of Babylon, the prophetic periods of 1260/2300 years, the Antichrist, and the sanctuary doctrine. No attempt can be made in this newsletter to examine the controversy surrounding these doctrines. They are mentioned simply to show some of factors which are weakening our Adventist identity.

### **Adventist Lifestyle Challenges**

The second component of our Adventist identity which has come under attack is the lifestyle. Traditionally Adventists have been known for their clean and healthy lifestyle. This consists in abstaining from coffee and alcoholic beverages, in eating mostly healthy vegetarian foods, in dressing modestly, avoiding revealing clothes, in cultivating the inner adornment of the heart rather than the outward ornamentation of the body with jewelry, and in engaging in wholesome recreation and amusements, avoiding movies that portray scenes that are contrary to Adventist moral standards.

These traditional lifestyle standards are gradually been replaced by more permissive attitudes. A question often posed to me during my weekend seminars is: “What is wrong . . .?” What is wrong with moderate drinking? What is wrong with dressing and adorning our bodies according to the latest fashion? What is wrong with being a gay or lesbian? What is wrong with living with someone without being married? What is wrong with going to a rock concert or to movie theaters?

These questions indicate that there are many sincere Adventists who are sincerely doing what is wrong. They sincerely believe that there is nothing wrong in premarital sex as long as they love their partner. They sincerely believe that Christians can watch violent or sex-filled movies as long as they do not become emotionally involved. They sincerely believe that they can listen to rock music as long as the beat is not too strong or the words are not too profane. They sincerely believe that they can divorce their marital partner if they no longer find fulfillment in their relationship. They sincerely believe that they can consume a moderate amount of alcohol and drugs as long as they

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do not become addicted. They sincerely believe that they can wear different kinds of jewelry as long as it is not too gaudy or too expensive.

One wonders, How can so many Christians be sincere and yet be sincerely wrong on vital aspects of Christian living? It would seem to me that part of the problem is a lack of understanding of the Gospel's claims on our daily lives. The prevailing concern seems to be to teach people how to be saved, rather than to train them in how to live the Christian life. There seems to be a reluctance to help people understand how accepting the Gospel affects the way we eat, drink, dress, adorn, and amuse ourselves. The result is, to use the words of Hosea, that "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos 4:6).

It is my conviction that we cannot blame church members for doing what is wrong, if we as spiritual leaders do not help them to see biblical reasons to do what is right. During the past 30 years of teaching and preaching around the world, countless times I have seen radical changes in the lifestyle of people who became convinced by Scripture and convicted by the Holy Spirit that certain habits or actions were wrong. There are many sincere Christians who want to know how to live according to the principles that God has revealed in the Bible. They appreciate when someone takes time to show them from the Bible and from personal example how to live the Christian life.

### **The Challenge of Worship Music**

The crisis of Adventist identity is reflected especially in the contemporary music adopted by a growing number of churches for the "Praise Service." This is the issue I wish to address in this newsletter, by sharing the highlights of my research on music in the Bible. The prevailing assumption is that the Bible endorses the loud, rocky music adopted by many churches for their worship service.

This mistaken assumption is promoted by such influential church leaders as Rick Warren, the founding pastor of the Saddleback Church—largest church in America with 50,000 members— and author of two best-selling books *The Purpose Driven Life* and *The Purpose Driven Church*. Several have asked me to review these books. I will do it as soon as I can find a breathing space. There are some fundamental biblical flaws in these books that need to be addressed.

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One of the flaws regards music. Pastor Warren teaches that “God loves all kinds of music,” including the popular rock music. He writes: “When I read about biblical worship in the Psalms, I see that they used drums, clashing cymbals, loud trumpets, tambourines and stringed instruments. That sounds a lot like contemporary music to me! . . . Saddleback is unapologetically a contemporary music church. We’ve often been referred to in the press as ‘The flock that likes to rock.’ We use the style of music the majority of people in our church listen to on the radio.” (“Selecting Worship Music,” by Rick Warren at <http://www.pastorport.com/ministrytoday.asp?mode=viewarchive&index=18>).

### **Pastor Warren’s Superficial Reading of the Bible**

The problem with Pastor Warren is his superficial reading of the Bible. Time and again he misuses Bible texts to promote his views. Had he done some homework, he would have discovered that percussion instruments like drums, timbrels, and tambourines were never used in the worship of God in the Temple, Synagogue, and early church. Thus, David could hardly have taught the use percussion instruments in the sanctuary worship, when, as we shall see, he did not allow them for the musical ministry of the Levites.

Psalms 149 and 150 do list eight instruments to be used to praise the Lord: trumpet, psaltery, harp, timbrel, string instruments, organs, cymbals, clashing cymbals (KJV). But Pastor Warren ignores the highly figurative language of Psalms 149 and 150, which hardly allows for playing rock music in the church. Psalm 149:5 encourages people to praise the Lord on the “couches.” In verse 6, the praising is to be done with “two-edged swords in the hands.” In verses 7 and 8, the Lord is to be praised for punishing the heathen with the sword, binding kings in chain, and putting nobles in fetters. It is evident that the language is figurative because it is hard to believe that God would expect people to praise Him in the church by standing or jumping on couches or while swinging a two-edged sword.

The same is true of Psalm 150 which speaks of praising God, in a highly figurative way. The psalmist calls upon God’s people to praise the Lord “for his mighty deeds” (v. 2) in every possible place and with every available musical instrument. In other words, the psalm mentions the *place* to praise the Lord, namely, “his sanctuary” and “his mighty firmament”; the *reason* to praise the Lord, namely, “for his mighty deeds . . . according to his exceeding greatness” (v. 2); and the *instruments* to be used to praise the Lord, namely, the eight listed above.

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This psalm makes sense only if we take the language to be highly figurative. For example, there is no way in which God's people can praise the Lord "in his mighty firmament," because they live on earth and not in heaven. The purpose of the psalm is not to specify the *location* and the *instruments* to be used to praise for church music. Nor it is intended to give a license to play rock music and dance in church. Rather, its purpose is to invite *everything* that breathes or makes sound to praise the Lord *everywhere*. To interpret the psalm as a license to play rock or dance in the church, is to misinterpret the intent of the Psalm.

### **Distinction Between Secular and Sacred Music**

Shortly we shall see that David restricted the musical instruments to be used in the Temple, keeping out percussion instruments, because they were associated with social entertainment. Thus, he could hardly have call upon people to worship God in His sanctuary with drums and tamburines, when he prohibited their use in the sanctuary. David understood that music associated with social entertainment has no place in the worship of god in His sanctuary. It is unfortunate that Pastor Warren, and many who follow him, do not understand the biblical distinction between sacred music for worship and secular music for entertainment.

Pastor Warren's church growth strategies are based on what people want, NOT on what God's Word teaches. To find out what people want he used a simply procedure. "I passed out a three-by-five card to everybody in the church, and I said, 'You write down the call letters of the radio station you listen to.' I wasn't even asking unbelievers. I was asking the people in the church, 'What kind of music do you listen to?' When I got it back, I didn't have one person who said, 'I listen to organ music.' Not one.... So, we made a strategic decision that we are unapologetically a contemporary music church. And right after we made that decision and stopped trying to please everybody, Saddleback exploded with growth . . . I'll be honest with you, we are loud. We are really, really loud on a weekend service.... I say, 'We're not gonna turn it down.' Now the reason why is baby boomers want to feel the music, not just hear it...."

By choosing to give to people what they want, rather than what they need, Pastor Warren ignores Christ commission to call people out of the world, and not to bring the worldly music into the church. "Know ye



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not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4).

### **The Criterion for Worship Music**

To clear the air of possible misconception, it is important to affirm that there are many contemporary songs with music and words suitable for worship. Some of the contemporary songs breathe genuine devotion such as “As the deer pants after the water, so my soul longs for Thee.” Both the tune and the words of this song fittingly express the spiritual longing of a sincere soul. So, it would be unfair to label all contemporary songs as “rock.”

But, many contemporary songs are rock music with Christian words. People respond to the beat of the music, rather than to the message of the words, because rock music impacts directly the body, bypassing the mind. Rock music is a music to be felt, not to be heard. It is a music designed to stimulate people physically, rather than elevating them spiritually. Our symposium on *The Christian and Rock Music* cites studies on the physical impact of rock music, including sexual arousal.

Sometimes ago I spoke at a rally where a well-equipped rock band with drums, synthesizers, and guitars, turned “Amazing Grace” into a rock song. They put so much beat into the hymn, that some people filed out of the pews and started swinging and dancing. It is evident that the words did not register in their mind, because one can hardly dance at the thought of God’s grace “that saved a wretched man like me.”

The criterion for worship music is not whether a song is traditional or contemporary but whether its melody, harmony, lyrics, and manner of singing conform to the biblical principle of worship music. Contrary to prevailing misconceptions, the Bible clearly differentiates between the music used for social entertainment and the music worthy of the worship of God. This vital distinction is brought out in Chapter 7, “Biblical Principles of Music,” which is the longest and, most likely, the most important chapter of our symposium on *The Christian and Rock Music*.

Seven scholars from six different countries, have contributed chapters to *The Christian and Rock Music*. Six of the writers are professional musician with graduate degrees in musical arts. If you do not have a copy of this timely

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book, you can order one simply by calling us at (269) 471-2915 or (269) 978-6878 or emailing us at: sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com

To facilitate the circulation of this timely book, we offer it by the case of 28 copies for only \$170.00, postage paid, that is \$6.07 per copy, instead of the regular price of \$20.00 per copy. Many music teachers have ordered the book by the case. Few days ago a music professor who lives in Loma Linda ordered four cases, that is, 112 copies.

*The Christian and Rock Music* has generated considerable controversy. In fact, Ed Christian attempted to challenge this symposium in his book *Joyful Noise: A Sensible Look at Christian Music*, published by Review and Herald in 2003. I have not read the book, because I find the title itself *irrational*. To assume that God can be praised by a “Joyful Noise,” means to believe that God finds delight in indiscriminate loud noise. But the God of biblical revelation is not a Being of confusion and noise, but of order and harmony. At the end of this newsletter you will find a review of *Joyful Noise*, published in *REFLECTIONS* (January 2004), the newsletter of the Biblical Research Institute.

### **An Experience at the South England Campmeeting**

Few days ago at the South England Campmeeting (England), I had an experience which influenced my decision to post excerpts from *The Christian and Rock Music*. Let me explain briefly what happened. On Wednesday afternoon, June 9, 2004, I was invited to speak at the Youth Tent on “The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages.” I reached the tent at 3:50 p. m. to quickly set up my projector for the PowerPoint presentation that was scheduled to begin ten minutes later at 4:00 p. m. On the platform there was a band of a dozen of young people blasting out their heavy beat music. They were practicing for the evening meeting, which consisted primarily of rock music.

After setting up my projector and lap top, I asked the youth leader if he could tell the band to stop, both because my eardrums were hurting and it was time to start. The band walked out of the tent when they got the message that I did not appreciate their rock music. We still had a decent attendance of about 300 people.

In my introductory remarks I mentioned that after hearing that blasting rock music, I felt that it would have been more appropriate for me to

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share my research on “The Christian and Rock Music.” But since I was expected to speak on the subject announced, I invited anyone interested to discuss the subject of music to come to my chalet after the meeting. A dozen of young adults (18 to 25 years old) came and we spent over an hour together.

As I shared some highlights of my research with these receptive young men and ladies, I was made aware of the need to help our young people to better understand those biblical principles that should guide their lives. I wish that more time could be devoted at Youth Tents to discuss the issues young people face today. Most of our young people are decent persons who look for guidance in our confused society. Unfortunately, from my chalet I could only hear the endless, relentless sound of beat music.

The young adults who came to visit me were surprised to learn that in Bible times, the music and percussion instruments associated with social entertainment (which was mostly of a religious nature) were not allowed in the worship service of the Temple, synagogue, and early church. There is no question that God’s people in Bible times clearly distinguished between sacred music used for divine worship and secular music employed for social entertainment.

This recent experience has reminded me of the need to help Adventists, young and old, to better understand the biblical principles that should guide us in our choice of worship music. This is the intent of this newsletter. If you find it helpful, be sure to share it with your friends, or even better, invite them to subscribe. Let them know that it is free service. All what they need to do is simply to reply, saying: SUBSCRIBE ME.

### **TV TAPING OF AN INTERVIEW AT 3ABN**

Few days ago I received an invitation to participate in two discussions that will be taped at the 3ABN studios on July 1, and aired on July 4. The first discussion will focus on “Religion and Politics.” Special attention will be given to President Bush’s appeal to Pope John Paul II to urge Catholic bishops to take a stronger stand against gay marriages. The question is: Should an American President call upon the Pope to help him in his bid for reelection by urging Catholics to support his stand against gay marriages?

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This program will be aired three times on July 4, 2000. The first airing will be at 2:00 a. m. US Eastern Standard Time which corresponds at 9:00 p. m (21:00 hour) in England. The second airing will be at 9:00 a. m. US Eastern Standard time, which corresponds to 4:00 a. m in England. The third airing will be at 10:00 p. m. US Eastern Standard Time which corresponds at 5:00 p. m (17:00 hour) in England. Your efforts to inform your friends about this program is greatly appreciated.

The second discussion will address Mel Gibson's movie on *The Passion of the Christ*. Unfortunately, many evangelical Christians, including a significant number of Adventists, have failed to discern the subtle and deceptive ways in which the movie promotes Catholic teachings and piety. I look forward to discuss the movie from a theological and historical perspective. After all I am in the process of writing a book on THE PASSION.

This invitation caught me by surprise because Bible scholars have been conspicuous for their absence in the 3ABN programs. I am told that changes are in the making. Scholars will be invited more frequently to address contemporary issues from a Biblical perspective. Let us wait and see if this proves to be true. The few European viewers who bought dishes to view the Hope Channel and 3ABN, would welcome such a change. They lament that much of the present programming revolves about half a dozen of Adventist preachers, who preach to American conservative Adventists. They wish that more scholars would be invited to address current issues from an Adventist perspective.

### **BED AND BREAKFAST IN LONDON, ENGLAND**

Are you planning to travel to London, England? If you do, you will be pleased to learn about a most gracious Adventist couple who offer the best accommodation and breakfast I have ever enjoyed. During the past two years I have been in London a dozen times, as a guest in several homes that offer bed and breakfast at a reasonable price. They all offer good service, but the home of Gary and Araxi Keshishian where I stayed few days ago, is by far the best. They treated me so well that I promised that I would announce their services in this newsletter. Let me give you five reasons why I like their service:

1. **THE ROOMS:** The two rooms for guests have a new carpet, new furniture, and large windows overlooking a splendid manicured garden with an

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incredible variety of flowers. The bathroom, next to the bedrooms, is modern with an efficient shower—a feature often missing in other homes I have stayed.

2. **THE LOCATION:** The location is very convenient, just five minutes walking distance from the Main Street shops and the Eastcote Underground (tube) that takes one directly to the Heathrow airport or to Central London.

3. **BREAKFAST:** Sister Araxi goes out of the way to prepare the breakfast of your choice, with cereal, juices, nuts, fruit, and cooked food.

4. **INTERNET SERVICE:** The house has a wireless service. Arthur, their son, spent considerable time and money to install a wireless service for me and future guests. For me internet service is a must. If your lap top has an airport, you can be on line from your room all the time without wire connections.

5. **ATMOSPHERE:** The atmosphere is pleasant and homely. Gary is a Cypriot who has worked until recently as an official translators for the government. Araxi is Armenian who has worked as an accountant for the past 17 years, until her company closed down. Both of them speak several languages and are very active in their local Adventist church.

6. **COST AND CONTACT:** The cost for Bed and Breakfast is only £20.00, that is about \$35.00 per day. You can contact them by phone: 011-44-20 8866 8821; cellular 011-44-7956-156-544. Their email address is: g.keshishian@cwcom.net. Their postal address is: 155 Woodland Avenue, Eastcote, Middlesex HA4 9QX, England.

### **“THE ADVENTIST IDENTITY CRISIS: A LOOK AT WORSHIP MUSIC”**

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“To rock or not to rock,” is the critical question rocking an increasing number of Seventh-day Adventist churches. A generation ago there was almost universal agreement that rock music, in whatever version, was inappropriate for personal and church use. Today “Christian” rock is fast replacing traditional music and instruments across denominational churches. In

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many churches the “praise bands” have replaced the choir, PowerPoint projection of songs has replaced the hymn books, synthesizers have replaced organs, and drums and guitars have taken their place in the repertoire of church music instrumentation.

Some people see these changes as a divine blessing, others as a satanic curse. There seems to be no neutrality on this issue. People are getting very hot under the collar as they defend their particular position. Often the arguments generate more heat than light, reflecting personal taste or culture rather than a grasp of the biblical principles of music. Ultimately the controversy over the use of rock music in worship, is fundamentally a theological question that must be resolved through an understanding of biblical teachings on this subject.

**Objectives of this Newsletter.** The overall objective of this newsletter is to distill from the Bible some basic principles regarding appropriate music for the church service and private use. The task is not easy because the Bible is not set up as a doctrinal manual with a section devoted exclusively to music. Instead, the Bible is a source book with over 500 references scattered throughout about music, musicians, singing, and musical instruments. The challenge is not where to find these references, but how to draw from them principles applicable to us today.

The content of this newsletter is largely excerpted from chapter 7 of the symposium on *The Christian and Rock Music*. For the sake of brevity, important sections on music in the synagogue and early church, have been omitted. The section on “Dance in the Bible,” has also been omitted and may be posted in a future newsletter. If you are interested to read in the complete study, we will be glad to mail you a copy of the book. Just email to us your request or call us at (269) 471-2915 or (269) 978-6878.

### **The Importance of Singing in the Bible**

The importance of music in the Bible is indicated by the fact that God’s creative and redemptive activities are accompanied and celebrated by music. At creation we are told that “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). At the incarnation, the heavenly choir sang: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!” (Luke 2:14). At the final consummation of redemption, the great multitude of the redeemed will sing: “Hallelujah! For the Lord our

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God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure” (Rev 19:6-8).

**The Reason for Singing.** In the Bible religious music is God-centered, not self-centered. The notion of praising the Lord for entertainment or amusement is foreign to the Bible. No “Jewish” or “Christian” music concerts were performed by bands or singing artists at the Temple, synagogue, or Christian churches. Religious music was not an end to itself, but as a means to praise God by chanting His Word. An amazing recent discovery is that the entire Old Testament was originally intended to be chanted (sung).

Singing in the Bible is not for personal pleasure nor for reaching out to the Gentiles with tunes familiar to them. It is to praise God by chanting His Word—a method known as “cantillation.” Pleasure in singing comes not from a rhythmic beat that stimulates people physically, but from the very experience of praising the Lord. “Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; sing praise to his name, for that is pleasant” (Ps 135:3; NIV). “How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him” (Ps 147:1. NIV).

Singing unto the Lord is “good” and “pleasant,” because it enables believers to express to Him their joy and gratitude for the blessings of creation, deliverance, protection, and salvation. Singing is seen in the Bible as an offering of thanksgiving to the Lord for His goodness and blessings. This concept is expressed especially in Psalm 69:30-31: “I will praise God’s name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving. This will please the Lord more than an ox, more than a bull with its horns and hoofs” (NIV).

The notion that *singing praises to the God is better than sacrifice* reminds us of a similar concept, namely, that obedience is better than sacrifice (1 Sam 15:22). Singing praises to God is not only a pleasant experience, but also a means of grace to the believer. Through singing, believers offer to God a worship of praise, enabling them to receive His enabling grace.

**The Manner of Singing.** To fulfill its intended function, singing must express joy, gladness, and thanksgiving. “Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving” (Ps 147:7). “I will praise thee with the harp for thy faithfulness, O my God; I will sing praises to thee with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel. My lips will shout

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for joy, when I sing praises to thee” (Ps 71:22-23). Note that singing is accompanied by the harp and lyre (often called psaltery—Ps 144:9; 33:2; 33:3), and not with percussion instruments. The reason is that string instruments blend with the human voice without supplanting it.

In numerous places the Bible indicates that our singing should be emotional with joy and gladness. We are told that the Levites “sang praises with gladness, and they bowed down and worshipped” (2 Chron 29:30). Singing should be done not only with gladness but also with the whole heart. “I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart” (Ps 9:1). If we follow this biblical principle, then our singing of hymns or praise songs in church should be joyful and enthusiastic.

**“Make a Joyful Noise unto the Lord.”** The admonition to “make a joyful noise unto the Lord” – a phrase that occurs with slight variations seven times in the KJV version of the Old Testament (Ps 66:1; 81:1; 95:1-2; 98:4, 6; 100:1) – is often used to defend the use of loud rock music in the church.

The defense of the use of deafening sound in the church service is based on the assumption that God does not really care about how we sound, as long as we make a joyful noise unto Him. Since rock bands with their electronic equipment produce a powerful, thundering loud noise, it is alleged that God is made very happy by such “joyful noise.”

Before examining those Bible texts where the phrases “joyful noise” or “loud noise” appear in some mistaken translations, it is important to remember that in Bible times there was no electronic amplification. What was loud in Bible times, would be very normal today. The singers that David appointed to “offer praises to the Lord with the instruments” (1 Chron 23:5) could produce at most a sound volume of about 70 or 80 decibels, because they had no amplification possibilities.

The usual choir was rather small, consisting of a minimum of 12 adult male singers, accompanied by few string instruments. The level of volume depended on the distance between the singers and the congregation. By contrast, today a four-man rock group with the right amplification system can output a sound power in the 130-140 decibel level, which can upstage a jumbo jet at takeoff. Such an excessive volume can easily damage eardrums, as I have personally experienced.



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**Does Loud Noise Praise God?** Do those Bible texts that speak about making “a joyful noise” or “a loud noise” unto the Lord teach us that God is pleased with the excessive amplification of the human voice or musical instruments during the worship service? Hardly so. This conclusion is largely drawn from a mistranslation of the original Hebrew terms commonly translated as “noise.” In his book, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World*, Curt Sachs answers this question: “How did ancient Jews sing? Did they actually cry at the top of their voices? Some students have tried to make us believe that such was the case, and they particularly refer to several psalms that allegedly bear witness of singing in fortissimo. But I suspect them of drawing from translations rather than from the original.”<sup>1</sup>

The phrase “make a joyful noise” is a mistranslation of the Hebrew *ruwa*. The term does not mean to make an indiscriminate loud noise, but to shout for joy. The God of biblical revelation does not delight in loud noise per se, but in joyful melodies. A good example is found in Job 38:7 where the same word *ruwa* is used to describe the sons of God who “shouted for joy” at creation. The singing of the heavenly beings at creation can hardly be characterized as “loud noise,” because “noise” presupposes unintelligible sound.

The mistranslation of *ruwa* as “noise” has been caught by the translators of the New International Version (NIV), where the term is consistently translated as “shout for joy” rather than “make a joyful noise.” For example, in the KJV Psalm 98:4 reads: “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all the earth: make a loud noise, and rejoice, and sing praise.” Note the more rational translation found in the NIV: “Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music” (Ps 98:4).

Church leaders like Rick Warren need to understand that there is a world of difference between “making a loud noise unto the Lord,” and “shouting for joy” or “bursting into jubilant song.” Singing jubilantly with the full volume of the human voice is not noise making, but an enthusiastic expression of praise.

Another self-evident example of mistranslation is found in Psalm 33:3 which in the KJV reads: “Sing unto him a new song; play skilfully with a loud noise.” The latter phrase is contradictory, because music skillfully played can hardly be described as “loud noise.” One wonders why the

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translators of the KJV did not see the contradiction. The NIV correctly renders the verse: “Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy” (Ps 33:3).

Singing, in the Bible, is not limited to the worship experience, but extends to the totality of one’s existence. Believers who live in peace with God have a constant song in their hearts, though the singing may not always be vocalized. This is why the Psalmist says: “I will praise the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live” (Ps 146:2; 104:33. NIV). In Revelation those who come out of the great tribulation are seen standing before God’s throne, singing with a loud voice a new song which says: “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb” (Rev 7:10). Singing praises to God is an experience that begins in this life and continues in the world to come.

### **The Music Ministry in the Temple**

The public ministry of music during Bible times offers significant lessons for church music today. Many of those involved in contemporary music ministry appeal to the different styles of music of the Old Testament for “doing their own thing.” They believe that music produced by percussion instruments and accompanied by dancing was common in religious services. Consequently, they maintain that some styles of rock music and dancing are appropriate for church services today.

A careful study of the function of music in the Old Testament reveals otherwise. For example, in the Temple musicians belonged to the professional clergy, played only on limited and special occasions, and used only few specific musical instruments. There was no possibility to turn the Temple service into a music festival where any Jewish “rock band” could play the entertainment music of the time. Music was rigidly controlled in the Temple. What is true of the Temple was later true also of the synagogue and the early church. This survey will help us to understand that in music, as in all areas of life, God does not give us the license to “do our own thing.”

**The Institution of the Music Ministry.** The transition from the unsettled, nomadic life in the desert to a permanent lifestyle in Palestine under the monarchy afforded the opportunity for developing a music ministry that would meet the needs of the worshipping congregation at the Temple. Prior to this time the references to music are primarily in conjunction with women

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singing and dancing to celebrate special events. Miriam led a group of women in singing and dancing to celebrate the overthrow of the Egyptians (Ex 15:1-21). Women played and danced for the conquering David (1 Sam 18:6-7). Jephthah's daughter met her father with timbrels and dance upon his return from battle (Judg 11:34).

With the establishment by David of a professional music ministry of Levites, music making was restricted to men. Why women were excluded from serving as musicians in the Temple is an important question that has baffled scholars. We shall comment upon it shortly. Women did continue making music in the social life of the people.

The book of Chronicles describes with considerable detail how David organized the music ministry of the Levites. An insightful analysis of how David accomplished this organization is provided by the doctoral dissertation of John Kleinig, *The Lord's Song: The Basis, Function and Significance of Choral Music in Chronicles*.<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of our study, we limit ourselves to a brief summary of those features that are relevant for the ministry of music today.

According to the first book of Chronicles, David organized the music ministry in three stages. First, he ordered the heads of the Levitical families to appoint an orchestra and a choir to accompany the transportation of the ark to its tent at Jerusalem (1 Chron 15:16-24).

The second stage occurred after the ark had been safely placed in its tent in his palace (2 Chron 8:11). David arranged for the regular performance of choral music at the time of the daily burnt offerings with choirs in two different places (1 Chron 16:4-6, 37-42). One choir performed under the leadership of Asaph before the ark in Jerusalem (1 Chron 16:37), and the other under the leadership of Herman and Jeduthun before the altar in Gibeon (1 Chron 16:39-42).

The third stage in David's organization of the ministry of music occurred at the end of David's reign when the king planned for the more elaborate music service that would be conducted at the temple that Solomon was to build (1 Chron 23:2 to 26:32). David established a pool of 4,000 Levites as potential performers (1 Chron 15:16; 23:5). From this group he formed a professional Levitical choir of 288 members. The Levite musicians accounted for more than ten percent of the 38,000 Levites. "Some kind of

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examination was probably necessary for the process of selection, since musical ability is not always inherited.”<sup>3</sup>

David himself was involved together with his officials in the appointment of twenty-four leaders of the watches, each of whom had twelve musicians for a total of 288 musicians (1 Chron 25:1-7). These in turn were responsible for the rest of the selection of the musicians.

**The Ministry of the Musicians.** To ensure that there would be no confusion or conflict between the sacrificial ministry of the priests and the music ministry of the Levites, David carefully delineated the position, rank, and scope of the ministry of the musicians (1 Chron 23:25-31). The performance of the ministry of music was subordinate to the priests (1 Chron 23:28).

The nature of the ministry of the musicians is graphically described: “They shall stand every morning, thanking and praising the Lord, and likewise at evening, and whenever burnt offerings are offered to the Lord on sabbaths, new moons and feast days, according to the number required of them, continually before the Lord” (1 Chron 23:30-31).

The context suggests that the musicians stood somewhere in front of the altar, since their music performance coincided with the presentation of the burnt offering. The purpose of their ministry was to thank and praise the Lord. They announced the Lord’s presence to His assembled people (1 Chron 16:4), reassuring them of His favorable disposition toward them.

**Successful Music Ministry.** The music ministry at the Temple was successful for several reasons which are relevant for our church music today. First, the Levite musicians were mature and musically trained. We read in 1 Chronicles 15:22 that “Kenaniah the head Levite was in charge of the singing; that was his responsibility because he was skillful at it” (NIV). He became director of music because he was an accomplished musician able to instruct others. The concept of musical skill is mentioned several times in the Bible (1 Sam 16:18; 1 Chron 25:7; 2 Chron 34:12; Ps 137:5). Paul also alludes to it when he says: “I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind” (1 Cor 14:15, NIV).

The choir consisted of a minimum of twelve adult male singers between the ages of thirty and fifty (1 Chron 23:3-5).<sup>4</sup> Rabbinical sources report that the musical training of a Levitical singer took at least five years of

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intensive preparation.<sup>5</sup> The biblical principle is that music leaders must be mature with an understanding of music, especially today as we live in a highly educated society.

Second, the music ministry at the Temple was successful because its musicians were prepared spiritually. They were set aside and ordained for their ministry like the rest of the priests. Speaking to the leaders of the Levite musicians, David said: “Sanctify yourselves, you and your brethren . . . So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves” (1 Chron 15:12, 14). The Levite musicians were given a sacred trust to continually minister before the Lord (1 Chron 16:37).

Third, the Levite musicians were full-time workers. 1 Chronicles 9:33 states: “Now these are the singers, the heads of father’s houses of the Levites, dwelling in the chambers of the temple free from other service, for they were on duty day and night.” Apparently the Levites’ ministry of music entailed considerable preparation, because we read that “David left Asaph and his brethren there before the ark of the covenant of the Lord to minister continually before the ark as each day required” (1 Chron 16:37). The biblical lesson is that ministers of music must be willing to work diligently in preparing the music needed for the worship service.

Lastly, the Levite musicians were not singing artists invited to entertain the people at the Temple. They were *ministers of music*. “These are the men whom David put in charge of the service of song in the house of the Lord, after the ark rested there. They ministered with song before the tabernacle of the tent of meeting” (1 Chron 6:31-32). Through their musical service the Levites “*ministered*” to the people. In five other instances in the Old Testament, the Levites are said *to minister* to the people through their music (1 Chron 16:4, 37; 2 Chron 8:14; 23:6; 31:2).

The ministry of the Levite musicians is well defined in 1 Chronicles 16:4: “Moreover he appointed certain of the Levites as ministers before the ark of the Lord, to invoke, to thank, and to praise the Lord, the God of Israel.” The three verbs used in this text—“invoke,” “thank,” and “praise”—suggest that the music ministry was a vital part of the worship experience of God’s people.

An indication of the importance of the music ministry can be seen in the fact that the Levite musicians were paid out of the same tithes given for the support of the priesthood (Num 18:24-26; Neh 12:44-47; 13:5, 10-12).

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The biblical principle is that the work of a minister of music should not be “a labor of love,” but a ministry supported by the tithe income of the church. It stands to reason that if a lay person volunteers to help in the music program of the church, such service does not need to be remunerated.

Summing up, the music ministry at the Temple was conducted by experienced and mature Levites who were trained musically, prepared spiritually, supported financially, and served pastorally. As Kenneth Osbeck observes: “To minister musically in the Old Testament was a great privilege and a most responsible service. This is still true of a church music-ministry today. In a very real sense we are New Testament Levites. Therefore these principles established by God for the Levitical priesthood should be noted as valid guidelines for music leaders in a New Testament church.”<sup>6</sup>

**The Levitical Choir and the Sacrificial Ritual.** The book of Chronicles presents the musical ministry of the Levites as part of the presentation of the daily offering at the Temple. The ritual consisted of two parts. First came the blood ritual which was designed to atone for the sins of the people through the transference of the blood of the sacrifice to the Holy Place (2 Chron 29:21-24). This service created the ritual purity necessary for God’s acceptance of His people and the manifestation of His blessing upon the congregation. During this ritual no songs were sung.

Once the rite of atonement was completed, the burnt offering was presented upon the altar. This ritual signalled God’s acceptance of His people and the manifestation of His presence. John Kleinig explains that “As the sacrifices were being burnt upon the altar, the trumpets, which announced the Lord’s presence, called for the prostration of the congregation in His presence, and the song of the Lord was sung by the musicians [2 Chron 29:25-30]. Thus, the choral service came after the rite of atonement had been completed. It did not attempt to secure a favorable response from the Lord but presupposed such a response as something already given. The musicians proclaimed the Lord’s name during the presentation of the sacrifices, so that he would come to His people and bless them, as He had promised in Exodus 20:24 and demonstrated in 2 Chronicles 7:1-3.”<sup>7</sup>

The function of the music during the sacrificial ritual was not to overshadow or replace the sacrifice itself, but to enlist the involvement of the congregation at certain designated moments during the service. In other words, the Israelites did not go to the Temple to hear the Levite bands

performing in sacred concert. Instead, they went to the Temple to witness and experience God's atonement for their sins. The music that accompanied the atoning sacrifice invited them to accept and celebrate God's gracious provision of salvation.

At a time when many Christians choose their churches in accordance with the musical style of worship, we need to remember that in the Bible, the music was never an end to itself. In the Temple the music served enhanced the sacrificial service by enlisting the participation of the congregation at certain specific moments. In the synagogue and the early church, music reinforced the teaching and proclamation of the Word of God. To be true to the biblical witness, our church music must support the teaching and preaching of God's Word, and not overshadow it.

**The Musical Instruments of the Temple.** David instituted not only the times, place, and words for the performance of the Levitical choir, but he also "made" the musical instruments to be used for their ministry (1 Chron 23:5; 2 Chron 7:6). This is why they are called "the instruments of David" (2 Chron 29:26-27).

To the trumpets which the Lord had ordained through Moses, David added the cymbals, lyres, and harp (1 Chron 15:16; 16:5-6). The importance of this combination as divinely ordained is indicated by the fact that this combination of instruments was respected for many centuries until the destruction of the Temple. For example, in 715 B. C., King Hezekiah "stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, harps, and lyres, according to commandment of David and of Gad the king's seer and of Nathan the prophet; for the commandment was from the Lord through his prophets" (2 Chron 29:25).

The trumpets were played by the priests and their number ranged from two in the daily worship (1 Chron 16:6; Num 10:2) to seven or more on special occasions (1 Chron 15:24; Neh 12:33-35; 2 Chron 5:12). "In worship at the Temple the trumpets gave the signal for the prostration of the congregation during the presentation of the burnt offering and the performance of the choral service (2 Chron 29:27-28). . . . While the Levitical musicians faced the altar, the trumpeters stood facing them in front of the altar (2 Chron 5:12; 7:6)."<sup>8</sup> This arrangement highlighted the responsibility of the trumpeters to give the signal for the congregation to prostrate and for the choir to sing.

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The cymbals consisted of two metal plates with reflexed rims about 10-15 inches wide. When struck together vertically, they produced a ringing, tinkling sound. Some appeal to the use of cymbals to argue that Temple music had a rhythmic beat like rock music today, and, consequently, the Bible does not forbid percussion instruments and rock music in the church today. Such an argument ignores the fact that, as Kleinig explains, “the cymbals were not used by the precantor to conduct the singing by beating out the rhythm of the song, but rather to announce the beginning of the song or a stanza in the song. Since they were used to introduce the song, they were wielded by the head of choir on ordinary occasions (1 Chron 16:5) or by the three heads of the guilds on extraordinary occasions (1 Chron 15:19). . . . Since the trumpets and the cymbals were played together to announce the beginning of the song, the players of both are called the ‘sounders’ in 1 Chronicles 16:42.”<sup>9</sup>

In his book *Jewish Music in Its Historical Development*, A. Z. Idelsohn notes that in the worship of the Temple only one pair of cymbals were used and that by the leader himself. “The percussive instruments were reduced to one cymbal, which was not employed in the music proper, but merely to mark pauses and intermissions.”<sup>10</sup> In a similar vein, Curt Sachs explains, “The music in the Temple included cymbals, and the modern reader might conclude that the presence of percussion instruments indicate rigid beats. But there is little doubt that the cymbals, as elsewhere, marked the end of a line and not the beats inside a verse. . . . A word for rhythm does not seem to exist in the Hebrew language.”<sup>11</sup> The term “Selah,” which occurs in some psalms to mark the end of a stanza, may indicate the place where the cymbals were struck.

The third group of musical instruments was comprised of two string instruments, the lyres and the harps, which were called “the instruments of song” (2 Chron 5:13) or “the instruments of God’s song” (1 Chron 16:42). As indicated by their descriptive name, their function was to accompany the songs of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord (1 Chron 23:5; 2 Chron 5:13). The musicians who played the harps and the lyres would themselves sing the song to their own accompaniment (1 Chron 9:33; 15:16, 19, 27; 2 Chron 5:12-13; 20:21).

In his book *The Music of the Bible in Christian Perspective*, Garen Wolf explains that “String instruments were used extensively to accompany singing since they would not cover up the voice or the ‘Word of Jehovah’ which was being sung.”<sup>12</sup> Great care was taken to ensure that the vocal praise



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of the Levitical choir would not be overshadowed by the sound of the instruments.

**Restriction on Musical Instruments.** Some scholars argue that instruments like drums, timbrel (which was a tambourine), flutes, and dulcimers were kept out of the Temple because they were associated with pagan worship and culture, or because they were customarily played by women for entertainment. This could well be the case, but it only goes to show that there was a distinction between the sacred music played inside the Temple and the secular music played outside.

A restriction was placed on the musical instruments and art expression to be used in the House of God. God prohibited a number of instruments which were allowed *outside* the Temple for national festivities and social pleasure. The reason is not that certain percussion instruments were evil per se. The sounds produced by any musical instrument are neutral, like a letter of the alphabet. Rather, the reason is that these instruments were commonly used to produce entertainment music which was inappropriate for worship in God's House. By prohibiting instruments and music styles, like dancing, associated with secular entertainment, the Lord taught His people to distinguish between the sacred music played in the Temple, and the secular, entertainment music used in social life.

The restriction on the use of instruments was meant to be a binding rule for future generations. When King Hezekiah revived Temple worship in 715 B.C., he meticulously followed the instructions given by David. We read that the king "stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, harps, and lyres, according to the commandment of David . . . for the commandment was from the Lord through his prophets" (2 Chron 29:25).

Two and a half centuries later when the Temple was rebuilt under Ezra and Nehemiah, the same restriction was applied again. No percussion instruments were allowed to accompany the Levitical choir or to play as an orchestra at the Temple (Ezra 3:10; Neh 12:27, 36). This confirms that the rule was clear and binding over many centuries. The singing and the instrumental music of the Temple were to differ from that used in the social life of the people.

**Lessons from the Temple Music.** What lessons can we learn from the music of the Temple? The absence of percussion musical instruments and

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of dancing bands in the music of the Temple indicates, as noted earlier, that a distinction must be made between the secular music used for social entertainment and the sacred music employed for worship service in God's House.

Church leaders, like Pastor Rick Warren, should be surprised to learn that no "Jewish Rock Bands" played at the Temple to entertain the people with loud rhythmic music, because the Temple was a place of worship and not a social club for entertainment. Contrary to Pastor Warren's strategy, David did not decide on the music to be played at the Temple by passing out a three by five card to find out what music taste of the Israelites.

No polling was necessary, because David knew that percussion instruments like drums, tambourines, timbrels or tabrets, commonly used for social entertainment, were inappropriate for the worship of God. The reason is simple: God's sanctuary is not a place of entertainment but a place of worship.

The lessons for us today are evident. Church music should differ from secular music, because the church, like the ancient Temple, is God's House in which we gather to worship the Lord and not to be entertained. Percussion instruments which stimulate people physically through a loud and relentless beat are as inappropriate for church music today as they were for the Temple music of ancient Israel.

A second lesson is that the musical instruments used to accompany the choir or the singing of the congregation should not cover up the voice. Like the string instruments used in the Temple, musical instruments used in the church today should support the singing. Musical instruments should serve as a hand-maiden to the Word of God which is sung and proclaimed. This means, for example, that organ music should not be so loud as to drown the voice of the congregation.

On numerous occasions I have been in churches equipped with powerful electronic organs that are played so loud that the voice of the congregation cannot be heard. Biblical principle indicates that the function of the organ is to support the singing of the congregation; not to cover it up. This principle applies not only to organ music, but to any other instrument or an orchestra that accompanies a choir or a singing congregation.

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The important biblical principle is that music in God's House, both instrumental and vocal, must respect and reflect the sacredness of the place of worship. When instruments are used to accompany the singing, they should support the human voice without supplanting it.

The lessons of the music ministry from the Temple were later followed in the music ministry of the synagogue and of early church. For the sake of brevity I am omitting these important sections which interested readers can find in chapter 7 of *The Christian and Rock Music*.

### **CONCLUSION**

Several important biblical principles relevant to church music today have emerged during the course of this study. An attempt will be made to summarize them by way of conclusion.

Music has a special place and purpose in God's universe. It is a divine gift to the human family through which human beings can express their gratitude to God while experiencing delight within themselves. Pleasure in singing comes not from a rhythmic beat that stimulates people physically, but from the very experience of praising the Lord. "How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him" (Ps 147:1. NIV).

God does care about how we sing and play during the worship service. He is not pleased with unintelligible "loud noise," but with orderly, melodious, and intelligible singing. Those Bible texts that speak about making "a joyful noise" or "a loud noise" unto the Lord do not teach us to praise God with excessive amplification of the human voice or musical instruments during the worship service. Such a notion is derived from a mistranslation of *ruwa* as "loud noise." The correct translation as found in the NIV is "shouting for joy."

Music ministry is to be conducted by people who are trained, dedicated, and spiritually minded. This lesson is taught by the Temple's music ministry, which was performed by experienced and mature Levites who were trained musically, prepared spiritually, supported financially, and served pastorally. This principle established by God for Temple musicians is applicable to ministers of music today.

Music is to be God-centered, not self-centered. The notion of praising the Lord for entertainment or amusement is foreign to the Bible. Percussion

instruments which stimulate people physically through a loud and relentless beat are as inappropriate for church music today as they were for the Temple music in ancient Israel.

The biblical principles of music outlined above are especially relevant today, when the church and the home are being invaded by various forms of rock music which blatantly rejects the moral values and religious beliefs espoused by Christianity. At a time when the distinction between sacred and secular music is blurred, and Adventists are loosing their sense of identity, we need to remember that the Bible calls us to “worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness” (1 Chron 16:29; cf. Ps 29:2; 96:9). May the Lord give us the discernment and desire to fill our homes and churches with music that meets His approval, rather than the applause of the world. By heeding to such call we will preserve our Adventist identity in our homes and churches.

### ENDNOTES

1. Curt Sachs, *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World* (New York, 1943), p. 80.
2. John W. Kleinig, *The Lord’s Song: The Basis, Function and Significance of Choral Music in Chronicles* (Sheffield, England, 1993).
3. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
4. See, Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA, 1969), pp. 173 and 208.
5. See, *Babylonian Talmud, Hullin 24*. The text is discussed by A. Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Music in Its Historical Development* (New York, 1967), p. 17.
6. Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Devotional Warm-Ups for the Church Choir* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1985), pp. 24-25.
7. John W. Kleinig (note 2), p. 113.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 80.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 82-83.
10. A. Z. Idelsohn, *Jewish Music in Its Historical Development* (New York, 1967), p. 17.
11. Curt Sachs, *Rhythm and Tempo* (New York, 1953), p. 79.
12. Garen L. Wolf, *Music of the Bible in Christian Perspective* (Salem, OH, 1996), p. 287.

## BOOK REVIEW

Ed Christian, *Joyful Noise: A Sensible Look at Christian Music*, Hagerstown: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2003, 173 pp. \$12.99.

Editorial Note. The reviewer, Wolfgang H. M. Stefani, is an Australian musician, scholar, pastor. He has earned graduate degrees in music, and a Ph.D. in Religious Education from Andrews University in 1993. His dissertation deals with “The Concept of God and Sacred Music Style.”

Stefani has taught church music, hymnology, philosophy of music, and religious education at the graduate and undergraduate levels. He has served for 14 years as a church musician: organist, pianist, minister of music, church music coordinator, and choir director. He has presented over 60 seminars on music in the United States, Mexico, Japan, Australia, France, Britain, Poland, and Scandinavia.

Publication of *Joyful Noise* by Ed Christian has again raised the profile of the music debate. This is always valuable because there is still much to think through and learn about Christian discipleship in this complex arena of life. *Joyful Noise* is substantially a reworked collection of pre-published articles centered on criticism of Samuele Bacchiocchi’s book, *The Christian and Rock Music*. It purports to be “a sensible look at Christian music” in order to bring healing on a sensitive subject and help alienated young people.

Christian’s appeal that music should not become a stumbling block to unity and that all music must be put on the same evaluation table is commendable. His comments on MTV videos, entertainment, applause, the need for worship music to be more congregational than “special music;” why hymns have been rejected, and the need for good song leaders are timely. The final sixty or so pages of the book present as genuine reflections from the heart of someone with a pastoral concern for the church.

However, the central thrust and apparent purpose of the publication needs greater depth and exhibits a cutting tone and weak arguments. Those who believe that Christian decision-making in music is largely a matter of subjective taste—that “any style of music can be used to convey a Christian message” and that “God approves and blesses, no matter what the style of music” as long as the lyrics support faith and Christian unity is not threat-

ened—will find this book a welcome confirmation of their viewpoint. However, readers who sense the subject’s complexities and who recognize the need for something more objective will be disappointed with the lack of penetrating analysis on issues grappled with for centuries. Some key concerns are as follows:

By framing his discussion as a reaction to Bacchiocchi’s book, the author ignores the debate’s wider context that transcends Christian denominational boundaries, world religions, cultures, and centuries. If resolution to the music debate was as simple as Christian suggests, why wasn’t it resolved generations ago? Christian gives the impression that the music argument is essentially a battle between elitist Western classical music lovers and those who are pro-CCM (Contemporary Christian Music). This issue, however, is much more complex.

Christian’s assertion that biblical references to music are “less useful than we think” while at the same time ignoring Ellen White materials is both surprising and unwarranted. In contrast, his emphasis on the so-called biblical imperatives of enthusiasm, clapping, and dancing leave one wondering what was so wrong with the Holy Flesh Movement in Indiana in 1900 which was opposed by Ellen White.

A disappointing feature of *Joyful Noise* is its cutting criticism of scholars in different fields of expertise. For example, the author caricatures Calvin M. Johansson’s position by painting an imaginary picture of his preferred church as “dead or dying.” In reality, Johansson is a professor at an Assemblies of God college and is known for his writings about Charismatic worship music practices.

Throughout the book, Christian’s constant mantra is that musical style is neutral. He simply asserts this, never offering evidence for it. Although he admits that, “there are some styles . . . that even without words are dark and menacing,” he keeps affirming that “God can be praised in every style.” Ultimately, what Christian is saying seems to boil down to doing whatever you feel is right for you. Such subjectivity is not really helpful when people sense the need for guidance. Undoubtedly, people come to know God through a variety of music styles, but God still holds his servants responsible for how they have represented him.

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If we adopt Christian's view that all styles of music are equally valid and that congregational offence is a significant arbiter of what ought to be done in a worship setting, we actually legitimize the pretext for people to worship with whatever music they find congenial and to form special interest worship groups based on similarity of musical taste. By this reasoning, rather than nurturing unity, music could become an even more divisive force within our church.

Although Christian speaks about his vision in terms of church relations and worship which is laudable, he fails to enunciate a musical vision—a vision of what “could be” musically in the church. His music philosophy is thoroughly pragmatic. It does not necessitate or call for Adventist musicians, as part of our wholistic message, to make a unique artistic contribution as a singular aesthetic witness to the world.

The fate of our young people is far too important to let our music drift randomly with no distinctive vision of what “ought to be” to guide it. Musically, as in all other arenas of life, P. T. Forsyth's comment is pertinent: “Unless there is within us that which is above us we shall soon yield to that which is around us.” I believe that there are young people within our ranks who, with their youthful idealism, enthusiasm, and God-given talent, would rise to the challenge of a viable alternative musical vision. Sadly, *Joyful Noise* misses that opportunity.