

Biblical Teachings On Music

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

On Sabbath morning, March 31, 2001, the telephone rang. An Adventist brother called me long distance just as my wife and I were ready to go to church. He was distressed over the fact that for the past three Sabbaths his family had not gone to their church because they found some of the contemporary music played during the "Praise Worship" very offensive. He then asked me: "What do you advise us to do?" My reply was for him to look for another Adventist church in his district where the music played is appropriate for worship.

This episode illustrates the challenge some Adventists are facing today. They can no longer worship God in good conscience in their own church because they are offended by some of the contemporary music played during the church service. Several recent incidents, to be mentioned shortly, have made me forcefully aware of how divisive music and worship styles are proving to be in some Adventist Churches today. It appears that the conflict over worship is largely replacing the controversy over such doctrinal issues as the investigative judgement, the nature of Christ, righteousness by faith, universal justification, or women ordination. Most churches are troubled today far more by the controversy over worship styles than by doctrinal issues.

Contemporary Christian Music is fast replacing traditional music and instruments across denominational churches, including an increasing number of Seventh-day Adventist churches. In many churches today "praise bands" have replaced the choir, overheads have replaced the hymn books, synthesizers have replaced organs, and drums and guitars have taken their place in the repertoire of church music instrumentation.

These changes in church music are causing controversies and divisions in many congregations. Some see the new "pop music" as the music of Babylon, while others as the prophetic "New Song" to reach and satisfy the baby-boomers' taste for rock music. Often the arguments generate more heat than light, reflecting personal taste or culture rather than a grasp of the biblical teachings on music.

Controversy over Music. An increasing number of Seventh-day Adventist churches are affected by the controversy over music. For some Adventists the decision on whether or not to attend a certain church, often impinges more on the kind of music played during the service, than on the style and content of preaching. Some Adventists are so offended by the music played at their church that they choose to stay home.

Let me illustrate this point by relating some other incidents. On April 14, 2001, I spoke in Bremen, Germany, at a rally of Adventist fellow believers who came from various parts of Germany. On Sabbath afternoon, during the question/answer period an Adventist sister asked: "At my church they have recently introduced a band that plays a beat music which is very offensive to me. What am I supposed to do? Should I go to church to be distressed by offensive music, or should I stay home and worship God by myself?"

I wished that you could have heard the passionate way in which this dear sister expressed her anguish at feeling pushed out of the church. I suggested her to express her disapproval over the kind of music played at church, both to the pastor and to the church board. If no change occurs, then she could walk outside the sanctuary while the beat music is played, and reenter after the music is finished. Her actions would make a clear statement to the church leaders and congregation, that she disapproved of the music played for the divine service.

During the three days I spent with our fellow believers in Bremen, I was repeatedly reminded of how pervasive “Christian rock” is becoming in Adventist churches in Germany. But the problem is not limited to Germany or to Europe. It is becoming a global problem. For example, In Sydney, Australia, I met a couple who I have known since academy days in Florence, Italy. They told me that for the past three months they had not attended the church where I was preaching that Sabbath, because they found the music played by the rock band during the church service very offensive and destructive to their worship experience.

Personally, I could relate to this couple because I had a similar experience in Australia at a campmeeting, where I was invited to speak to the young adults. The evening I arrived I witnessed in the youth tent a band of hippie-looking-young people blasting high-decibel, heavy-beat, rock music with pulsating lights, smoke effects, and all the trimmings typical a night club. Nobody could tell what they were singing about because the excessive volume drowned out the words. Truly, it was a shocking experience for me. I felt that I had landed in a night club and not at an Adventist youth rally.

The Music Controversy in the United States

The situation is not much better in the United States. An increasing number of American Adventist churches are introducing rock bands to lead out in the “Praise Worship.” By a rock band I mean half a dozen youths playing the standard instruments: amplified electrical guitars, electrical bass, drum set, and keyboard instruments like synthesizers.

The introduction of rock bands in Adventist churches is causing considerable distress to those members who find their beat music unacceptable for church worship. Fellow believers from across the USA and overseas have shared their pain with me. For example, a fine young man who graduated as an architect at Andrews University with my son, Dany, emailed to me a lengthy message where he describes his painful experience of having to leave the church that he and his wife loved and attended for several years. The reason was that they were deeply offended by the music played by the rock band, which their new pastor pushed hard to set up in the church, despite of considerable opposition. Fortunately, this couple was able to find and join another Adventist Church in the same city, where the worship service is reverential.

Sometimes the conflict over music and worship styles results in two conflicting worship services conducted at the same time. I found this to be true few weeks ago in a beautiful Adventist Church in the North West where I was invited to present my Advent Seminar. Across the parking lot from the main sanctuary there is a banner placed across the external wall of the fellowship hall, saying “Praise Worship. Join us for the Divine Service.” I was informed that the banner advertises the “Praise Worship” conducted with beat music at the same time as the 11:00 a. m. divine service in the main sanctuary. In other words, while the pastor preaches to about 200-250 people in the main sanctuary, about 100-150 people have their own “Praise Worship” led by a rock band in the fellowship hall. Their banner is designed to recruit church members from the main sanctuary to their beat service in the fellowship hall. I heard the band for few moments on Friday night while they were practicing. The new pastor is not happy with this arrangement which he found already in place at his arrival.

In spite of my pleas for a united church service in occasion of my Advent Seminar, the “Praise Worship” group chose to go ahead with their own service. For the sake of accuracy I need to say that several of its members came over to the main sanctuary which was packed to capacity with visitors from several surrounding churches. It was hard for me to believe that some “Praise Worship” members, would rather play their beat music than listen to timely presentations from a visiting scholar, which their church had invited at considerable expense.

The worship problem we are facing today extends beyond the use of beat music for worship. It includes various forms of “entertainment gimmicks.” There are worship leaders who seek to reach out to the youth, young adults, and the unchurched, by employing drama, Gospel puppets, Gospel clowns, and even Gospel magic. Recently I received an email message from an Adventist fellow believer who asked me what I thought about their new pastor using magic tricks during his sermon. This is not an isolated case. It reflects the new trend to make the worship service as entertaining as possible.

The use of entertainment gimmicks to communicate the Gospel, trivializes and cheapens the message of the Gospel. Entertainment is entertainment and can hardly be used to communicate serious messages. If professionals, like doctors, teachers, or politicians, do not resort to frivolous entertainment to communicate their important messages, it would be folly for preachers to announce God’s final message of warning and judgement to a dying world by means of entertainment gimmicks.

The Future of Adventism

The conflict over worship styles could impact the future of Adventism more than many of us realize. It could result in two types of Adventist churches. Some churches will remain “message oriented.” Their music is sacred and designed to prepare the congregation for the proclamation of the Word of God. Other churches will become “entertainment oriented.” Their music is more secular and it promotes self-gratification rather than God’s glorification.

The outcome of this trend could be a *crisis of identity* for the Adventist Church. It will become more and more difficult to tell the difference between Adventists and non-Adventists in their church services. Attending some Adventist church services may prove to be very similar to attending some of the local charismatic churches.

The adoption by some Adventist churches of popular charismatic styles worship, reflects the desire to gain acceptance in our society. Some feel that we need to minimize the differences in doctrines, church worship, and lifestyle, and maximize our similarities to prevailing evangelical beliefs and worship styles. The result is a *crisis of identity*. It will become increasingly difficult to tell the difference between a charismatic Adventist and a non-Adventist in lifestyle, church services, educational programs, and evangelistic outreach.

The loss of a clear sense of identity and mission will affect the commitment of many of our members to the outreach programs of the church. More and more Adventists will feel less motivated to support a church which they feel is losing its distinctive identity, message, mission, and worship style. All of this goes to show that what is at stake, is not merely preferences over worship styles, but the future of Adventism.

A Major Cause

The causes of our current conflict over church music are varied. For the sake of brevity, I will limit my remarks to what appears to me a major cause, namely, the pressure of conformity, which causes some Adventists to ignore what the Bible teaches regarding the use of music for worship. Since most Protestant and Catholic churches have adopted some version of “Christian Rock” for their church services, some Adventists feel compelled to follow their example. They believe that the adoption of the same kind of music for Adventist church services, can facilitate the outreach to other Christians and non-Christians, as well as the acceptance by the Christian community at large.

To justify this policy, two arguments are often used: (1) There is nothing wrong in adopting rock music by changing its lyrics, because the message is in the words, not in the music. (2) The Bible sanctions the use of rhythmic, dancing music and percussion instruments for divine worship.

These two arguments are examined at great length in our symposium ***THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC***, and they are shown to be devoid of scientific and biblical support. The symposium is produced by seven scholars of six different nationalities. They take a calm, balanced, and biblical look at the use of popular music for worship. With the exception of myself, all the contributors are trained musicians with academic degrees, passionately involved in enriching the worship service of their congregations through their music.

The response to the new book has surpassed our fondest expectations. Messages are coming in from all over the world expressing appreciation for the valuable insights and blessings received from reading this timely study. It has been especially gratifying to receive messages of commendation from Adventist music professors who have ordered the book for their college and academy students.

Seventeen Conference presidents in North America have donated the book to all their workers. The REVIEW AND HERALD purchased 2000 copies. Dr. Humberto Rasi, Director of the Education Department of the General Conference was so impressed by the book that he offered to give it international exposure around the world in the COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY DIALOGUE magazine published by the General Conference. He asked permission to publish in DIALOGUE an excerpt from the book entitled "Shall We Dance?"

To make it possible for many people to benefit from this timely study, we offer the book by the case of 26 copies for only \$6.50 per copy, postage paid (\$170.00 for the whole case), instead of the regular price of \$20.00 per copy. At the end of the newsletter you will find instructions on how you can order the book by phone, email, or regular mail.

Two-Hour Lecture on "The Christian and Music"

This newsletter summarizes the highlights of this research which I have condensed into a two-hour lecture (50 pages of text) entitled "The Christian and Music." Initially, I intended to post the whole lecture (over 100K), but I decided against it because some of our subscribers cannot receive messages longer than 50/60K. Consequently, I decided to post only the second half of the lecture, which deals specifically with the biblical teaching on music. The complete lecture is available in two audio cassettes.

The first part of the lecture, which is not included in this newsletter, examines the nature, effects, and moral values of rock music. It notes that during its half-century of existence, rock has undergone an easily-discernible hardening process. What began in the fifties as plain rock, gradually became mellow rock, folk rock, soul rock, funk rock, psychedelic rock, disco rock, hard rock, heavy metal rock, punk rock, thrash metal rock, rave rock, and rap rock. Each new type of rock has proven to be more sexually explicit, violent, and vulgar than the previous ones. The music promotes, among other things, open ejection of the Christian faith and values, sexual perversion, civil disobedience, violence, satanism, occultism, and homosexuality.

The defining characteristics of all rock music, including "Christian" rock, are ***volume, repetition, and beat***. It is a music designed to be felt, rather than to be heard. The relentless beat in rock music explains why its impact is ***musical*** rather than ***lyrical***. This explains why the effects of rock music are the same whether the words are evil or based on Scripture. In other words, changing the words of rock music does not change its impact on the body and the mind.

The conclusion of the first part of the lecture is that the capacity of rock music to alter the mind and to cause several physical reactions, including sexual arousal, constitutes a fundamental reason for avoiding such music. A disciplined Christian lifestyle calls for the avoidance of mind-altering music or drugs which impairs the mental judgment, thus favoring irresponsible behavior. You can enjoy this lecture by listening to the first of the two cassettes on "The Christian and Music."

The second part of the lecture posted in this newsletter is divided into three parts. The first part examines the importance of music in the Bible, especially singing. The second part considers the ministry of music in the Bible. The investigation shows that, contrary to prevailing assumptions, the Bible makes a clear distinction between sacred and secular music. Percussion instruments, rhythmic music with a beat, and dancing were never part of the music ministry of the Temple, the synagogue, or the early church. The third part examines what the Bible teaches about dancing.

This popular two-hour lecture on "The Christian and Music," which I have delivered in different parts of the world, was professionally recorded a few days ago. It is now available in two cassettes for only \$10.00, postage paid. You can order it by calling us at (616) 471-2915 or by using the order form found at the end of this newsletter.

A Needed Clarification

The aim of our symposium was not to dismiss all contemporary music as "rock." There are many contemporary songs with melodies, harmonies, and lyrics which are suitable for divine 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."

Incidentally, my youngest son, Gianluca reminded me while I was writing *The Christian and Rock Music*, that a few years ago we used a lovely contemporary song entitled "Welcome Home Children," for a special video-recording entitled "Sabbath in Songs." Both the tune and words of this song speak to my heart when sung reverentially. Listen to the words:

A great day is coming
heaven's gates will open wide,
and all who love the Lord will enter in.
Joined with our loved ones
who in Jesus Christ have died
our eternal life together will begin.

It is hard not to be moved by the music and message of this contemporary song. These personal experiences and comments are designed to reassure you that the purpose of our research was not to bash all contemporary music as "satanic rock." There are contemporary songs which are appropriate for worship. The issue is not whether a song is traditional or contemporary but whether its music, words, and manner of singing conform to the biblical principles of worship music.

Contrary to prevailing misconceptions, we shall see in this study that the Bible clearly differentiates between music used for social entertainment and music worthy of the worship of God. The music and 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.

A THANK YOU NOTE:

Thank you for taking time in your busy schedule to read these lengthy newsletters. If these Bible studies enrich your understanding and experience of Biblical truths, be sure to invite your friends to subscribe. All what they need to do is to email me a request at: <sbacchiocchi@qtm.net> As a result of your promotional endeavors over 13,000 people are already benefiting from these Bible studies.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the seminars for the months of April and May 2001. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special seminar in your area during the latter part of this year. I still have a few open weekends.

MAY 27 TO JUNE 2: CAROLINE CONFERENCE CAMPMEETING

Location: Lake Junaluska in North Carolina

For information call Carolina Conference office at (704) 596-3200

NEW RECORDING OF THE SABBATH ENRICHMENT SEMINAR

The new recording of the **SABBATH ENRICHMENT SEMINAR** done last February at Pastor Doug Batchelor's Sacramento Central SDA, is proving to be very popular. The seminar consists of six one-hour presentations, dealing with historical, theological, and practical aspects of the Sabbath. We have received many orders from different part of the world.

During the past few weekends, I have shown one or two of the video lectures on Sabbath afternoon before my live presentation. Some told me that they found the video lectures more captivating than the live presentations. .

To make it possible for small congregations that cannot afford to fly me in for a live weekend seminar, I am pleased to loan free of charge to your church the complete **SABBATH ENRICHMENT SEMINAR** in six videos presentations. Your church will be responsible only for the cost of shipping and handling. To order your set of Sabbath Seminar videos, call us at (616) 471-2915. We will do our best to accommodate as many people as possible.

A UNIQUE SABBATH TRAIL

Washington, New Hampshire is known as the birthplace of the first Sabbathkeeping Adventist Congregation. It was established in the autumn of 1844 by William Farnsworth. The original church still exists and is used during the Summer months.

Pastor Merlin Knowles of the Washington church, in answer to prayer, was impressed to build a Sabbath Trail next to the church, that would beautifully tell the story of the Sabbath to visitors of all denominations who visit the historic church each year.

Dedicated in 1998, this unique one mile long trail is located in the woods surrounding the church with thirty-one sites where visitors can sit on benches and read attractively engraved granite markers that tell the story of the Sabbath from Creation to the New Earth.

May I encourage you to make a visit to the Sabbath Trail either in person or via the Internet at: <http://www.tagnet.org/washington/>. You will find this to be a most pleasant experience.

BIBLICAL TEACHINGS ON MUSIC

Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D., Retired Theology Professor, Andrews University

It is not uncommon to meet people who believe that they already know what the Bible teaches on church music, though they have made little or no effort to find out what the Bible really teaches on this subject. Their attitude reminds me of the story of a man who, during an election campaign, had a bumper sticker which read, "My mind is already made up. Please do not confuse me with the facts." As Christians we cannot afford to close our minds to the search for biblical truths, because we are called to grow in "grace and knowledge" (2 Pet 3:18).

Sometimes we think we know all that the Bible teaches on a certain doctrine, but when we begin investigating it, we soon discover how little we knew. This has been my experience regarding music. The many months I have spent examining the biblical references to music, singing, and musical instruments, have made me aware of the fact that the Bible has far more to say about music, especially church music, than I had ever imagined. It is a privilege to share this learning experience with all those who are eager to understand more fully the biblical principles of music.

Objectives of this Presentation

The overall objective of this presentation 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.

I will make no attempt to trace the history of music in the Bible. Several scholarly studies already address this subject. Our goal is to look at music in the Bible theologically rather than historically. What we seek to understand is the nature and function of music in the social and religious lives of God's people. More specifically, we want to ascertain what distinction, if any, the Bible makes between sacred and secular music. We want to find out in a special way if rhythmic music associated with dancing and entertainment was ever used in the Temple, the synagogue, or the early church.

This presentation is divided into three parts. The first part examines the importance of music in the Bible, especially singing. We will address the question of when, where, how, and why should we sing.

The second part considers the ministry of music in the Bible. The investigation begins with the music ministry in the Temple and then continues with that of the synagogue and finally the New Testament church. The results of this investigation are significant because they show that, contrary to prevailing assumptions, the Bible makes a clear distinction between sacred and secular music. Percussion instruments, rhythmic music with a beat, and dancing were never part of the music ministry of the Temple, the synagogue, or the early church.

The third part of this chapter examines what the Bible teaches about dancing. The question we address is whether or not the Bible sanctions dance as a positive component of church worship. This is an important question because supporters of pop music appeal to some biblical references to dance to justify their use of rhythmic dance music in the church. By way of conclusion, a brief summary will be given of the biblical principles that have emerged in the course of this study.

The Importance of Music 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 God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exalt 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 the fine linen, bright and pure" (Rev 19:6-8).

There are numerous examples in the Bible of God's creation being invited to sing praises to God (Ps 96:11-12; 98:8; 103:22; 104:12; Is 44:23; 42:1-12). More wonderful than all of nature singing is the invitation extended to human beings to sing. "O Come, let us sing unto the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!" (Ps 95:1). "Sing praises to the Lord, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name" (Ps 30:4; Ps 107:8).

God's Glorification. The Bible specifically mentions that singing should be directed to God. *Its purpose is not personal gratification, but God's glorification.* Moses said to the people: "I will sing unto the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously" (Ex 15:1). David declared: "I will extol thee, O Lord, among the nations, and sing praises to thy name" (2 Sam 22:50). Similarly, Paul exhorts the believers to sing and make melody "unto the Lord with all your heart" (Eph 5:19).

Singing in the Bible is not only *for* God, it is also *from* God. It is God's gift to the human family. In praising God for His deliverance, David says: "He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God" (Ps 40:3). Thus, music can be inspired by God, just as His Holy Word. A telling proof is the fact that the longest book of the Bible is Psalms—the hymn book of God's people in Bible times. This means that sacred music is not only a human artistic expression, but also a revelation of truths about God. We may differ on the style or types of music, but no Christian can legitimately be opposed to music per se, because music is part of God's gracious provision for the human family.

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 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—a method known as "cantillation"—a rather monotonous way of singing within the range of few notes.

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 for His creative and redemptive activities. Pleasure in singing comes not from a rhythmic beat that stimulates people physically, but from the very experience of praising the goodness of 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).

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 comparable to sacrificial offerings. 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." Singing pleases God more than sacrifices, because through singing believers offer to God a worship of praise and thanksgiving.

The Ministry of Music in the Temple

Those who defend the use of beat music for worship, appeal to certain Bible texts which speak of percussion instruments and dancing. The prevailing assumption is that the Bible sanctions the use of rhythmic dancing music and percussion instruments for worship. A careful study of the ministry music in the Bible reveals otherwise.

Carefully Organized and Rigidly Controlled. The music ministry in the Temple was carefully organized and rigidly controlled. What is true of the Temple was later true also of the synagogue and the early church. For example, in the Temple musicians belonged to the professional clergy, played only on limited and appointed times, and used only few specific musical instruments. There was no possibility to turn the Temple service into a music festival where any Jewish “rock bands” could play the entertainment music of the time.

The book of Chronicles describes with considerable detail how David organized the music ministry of the Levites. 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 in 1 Chronicles 23:30-31: “They shall stand every morning, thanking and praising the Lord, and likewise at evening, and whenever burnt offerings are offered to the Lord on Sabbath, new moons and feast days, according to the number required of them, continually before the Lord.”

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.

In 1 Chronicles 16:8-34 we find a remarkable hymn of praise that was sung by the Temple choir. This song consists of portions of Psalms 105, 96, and 106, which were reworked and recombined to produce this remarkable liturgical text. The song itself begins and ends with a call to thanksgiving. A concluding petition and doxology are appended in 1 Chronicles 16:35-36. We thus have in 1 Chronicles 16:8-34 a carefully crafted composition which has been placed there to demonstrate the basic pattern of thanksgiving which David instituted for performance by the singers in Jerusalem.

Four Reasons for the Success of the Music Ministry

The music ministry at the Temple was successful for four major reasons which are relevant for our church music today.

First, the Levite musicians were **trained musically**. 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. Jewish sources inform us that the musical training of a Levitical singer took at least five years of intense preparation.

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 **supported financially** as full-time workers. 1 Chronicles 9:33 states: "Now these are the singers, the heads of father's houses of Levites, dwelling in the chambers of the temple free from other service, for they were on duty day and night."

Lastly, the Levite musicians **served pastorally**, not as singing artists invited to entertain the people at the Temple, but as ministers of music. At least seven times 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). For example, we read in 1 Chronicles 6:31-32: "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." Through their musical service the Levites "ministered" to the people.

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). 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.**

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 to enhance the sacrificial service** by enlisting the participation of the congregation at certain specific moments. Similarly, 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).

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. They were not used 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 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

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). String instruments were used extensively to accompany the singing since they would not cover up the voice or the "Word of Jehovah" which was being sung. Great care was taken to ensure that the vocal praise of the Levitical choir would not be overshadowed by the sound of the instruments.

Restriction on Musical Instruments. 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.

Three significant lessons can be learned from the music used in the Temple. First, ***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.*** The absence in the Temple of percussion instruments, like drums, tambourines, timbrels or tabrets, which were commonly used for making entertainment music, teaches us that church music should be different 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 taught by the music of both the earthly and heavenly Temples is that ***instrumental accompaniments are to be used to aid the vocal response to God and not to drown the singing.*** In Revelation, it is the harps' instrumental ensemble that accompanies the singing of the choirs, because the harp's sound blends well with the human voice, without supplanting it. This means that any loud, rhythmic music that drowns out the sound of the lyrics is inappropriate for church worship.

Third, ***church music should express the delight, the joy and the reverence of being in the presence of the Lord.*** The singing of the various choirs in Revelation is heartfelt, expressive, and reverent. They sing with a "loud voice" (Rev 5:12; 7:10) and express their emotions, saying "Amen. Hallelujah" (Rev 19:4). Both in the Jerusalem Temple and in the heavenly sanctuary, God is worshipped with great reverence and respect. The same attitude should be manifested in our worship today, because God does not change.

The Music Ministry in the Synagogue

The function of music in the synagogue differed from that of the Temple, primarily because the two institutions had different purposes. The Temple was primarily where sacrifices were offered on behalf of the whole nation and of individual believers. The synagogue, on the other hand, emerged most likely during the Babylonian exile as the place where prayers were offered and scripture was read and taught. While there was only one Temple for the whole nation, according to the Talmud, there were 394 synagogues located in Jerusalem alone in Jesus' time.

The difference in function between the Temple and the synagogue is reflected in the different roles that music played in these two institutions. While the music of the Temple was ***predominantly vocal***, with string instruments aiding the singing, the music of the synagogue was ***exclusively vocal***, without any instruments. The only exception was the ***shofar***—the ram-horn that served as a signal instrument.

In the Temple the ministry of music was in the hands of professional musicians. Their choral music was an accessory to the sacrificial ritual. We might say that the music was "***sacrifice-centered***." The participation of the congregation was limited to affirmative responses as "Amen," or "Hallelujah." By contrast, in the synagogue the service, including the music, was in the hands of lay persons and their music was, as Curt Sachs call it, "logenic," that is, "***Word-centered***."

Blurring of Music and Speech. The distinction between music and public speech was blurred in the synagogue, because the word-centered worship migrated back and forth between speech and song. The musical ambiguity of the synagogue service was caused by the fact that much of the service consisted of prayers and the public reading of the Scriptures, which often took the form of chanting, known as "cantillation."

"The concept that the entire Old Testament was originally intended to be chanted (sung) is a new concept to church musicians and pastors, but it is a long established fact among scholars of Bible music. The reason that it is such a well-kept secret is that we tend to ignore what we do not understand."

"The intonations or cantillations, mentioned as far back as the first century, were cast into a system of modes or formulae, one for each of the books of the Bible intended to be publicly read. . . . Little is known about when the transition from declamatory to musical reading was first evidenced, except that the Psalms were sung in temple worship. Idelsohn and Werner both believe that the chanting of Scripture, in one form or another, went back perhaps as far as Ezra (fifth century B.C.), and that its eventual complexity and organization was the result of hundreds of years of crystallization."

One of the surprising discoveries of recent years is that the accents of the Masoretic Hebrew Text are musical notations. This made it possible for some scholars to

decipher the ancient music of the Bible, which was found to consist of a seven-note diatonic scale, strikingly similar to our modern diatonic scale.

Relevance of Synagogue Music for Today. What lessons can we learn from the ministry of music at the synagogue? Are we required to chant scripture today as the Jews have historically done in the synagogue? No. Nothing in the Bible commands us to sing the Scriptures. This does not exclude the possibility of learning scripture by means of the “Scripture song” and “Psalm-singing.” In fact, considerable efforts have been done in recent times to set to music numerous Psalms and Bible passages.

We have seen that the ministry of music at the synagogue was largely a ministry of the Word. The Jews came together to the synagogue in a rather informal setting to pray, read, and sing the Scriptures. For them, music was not an end to itself, but a means of praising the Lord by chanting His Word and thus learning His revealed will.

At a time when much of contemporary Christian music is deficient in scriptural content and Christian artists often draw the attention of the people to their singing abilities rather than to the teachings of God’s Word, it is good to remember that the music of the synagogue, which Jesus Himself sang, was “**Word-centered**”—it was designed to teach and proclaim the great Scriptural truths.

Does our church music help us to hear the Word of God clearly? Remember that “faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17, NIV). Church music should help us hear the Word of God through its sound, the character of the composition, and its lyrics.

Another important lesson is that the music of the Temple and synagogue was distinct from that of the pagan society. While much of the music played in the pagan society was improvised, “the rigid training of the Levites as described by Josephus and rabbinical sources left little room for spontaneous improvisation. . . . In this respect the Temple [and the synagogue] music must have been untypical of Middle Eastern music, in which improvisation is normally indispensable.”

The Music Ministry in the New Testament

To speak about a music ministry in the New Testament may seem completely out of place, because the New Testament is silent about any “musical” office in the church. Outside the book of Revelation, in which music is part of a rich eschatological drama, only a dozen passages refer to music.

None of these passages, however, gives us a clear picture of the role that music played in church services during New Testament times. This is not surprising, because New Testament believers did not see their worship gatherings as being much different from those of the synagogue. Both were conducted in an informal setting, with lay people leading out in the prayer, reading, singing, and exhortation. The New Testament references to worship gatherings reflect to a large extent the worship service of the synagogue. The fundamental difference between the two was the messianic proclamation, which was present only in the Christian worship.

Instructions Regarding Music. Few instructions regarding church music are found in the Epistles. James states that if a person is cheerful “Let him sing praise” (James 5:13). The implication is that singing should spring from a cheerful heart. Presumably, the singing of praises occurred not only privately at home, but also publicly in the church. Other texts suggest that the singing of hymns of praise was a feature of the church service.

More specific information comes to us from Paul, who provides us with insights into the role of music in the New Testament worship services. In the context of his admonitions regarding ecstatic manifestations at the Corinthian church, Paul calls for a balance in music making by urging that singing be done with the mind as well as the spirit:

“I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also” (1 Cor 14:15). Apparently, some sang ecstatically without engaging the mind. Senseless singing is like senseless speech. Both dishonor God, because, as Paul says: “God is not a God of confusion but of peace” (1 Cor 14:33).

Paul’s admonition to sing with the mind, or with understanding, is relevant for us today when the singing done in some charismatic churches consists of emotional outbursts of ecstatic shouting which no one can understand. Our singing must be with understanding because God expects from His intelligent creatures “a rational worship” (Rom 12:2—*logike*, that is, “logical” in the Greek).

Singing should be for **spiritual edification** and not for **physical stimulation**. Paul says: “When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification” (1 Cor 14:26). This text suggests that the church service was rather informal, like that of the synagogue. Each one contributed something to the worship experience.

Some members contributed a hymn to the service. Most likely a hymn was a newly composed song of praise directed to Christ. Bible scholars have identified several Christ-centered hymns in the New Testament. The important point is that the singing, like all parts of the church service, was to edify the congregation. The biblical principle, then, is that church music should contribute to the spiritual edification of the believers.

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs. The two remaining Pauline texts (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16) are the most informative about music in the New Testament. Paul encourages the Ephesians to “be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart” (Eph 5:18-19). In a similar vein, the apostle admonishes the Colossians: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col 3:16).

Both passages provide the earliest indication of how the apostolic church differentiated between the psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. It is hard to draw hard-and-fast distinctions between these terms. Most scholars agree that the three terms loosely refer to the various forms of musical compositions used in the worship service.

The psalms most likely are those of the Old Testament, though there may have been some Christian additions. The hymns would be newly composed songs of praise directed to Christ. Some evidence for these Christ-centered hymns appears in the New Testament (Eph 5:14; 1 Tim 3:16; Phil 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20; Heb 1:3). The spiritual songs probably refer to spontaneous praise songs which the inspiring Spirit placed on the lips of the enraptured worshipper (1 Cor 14:15).

The phrase “addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” suggests that the singing was interactive. Presumably some of the singing was responsorial, with the congregation responding to the song leader. The singing was to be done with “thankfulness” and “with all your heart.” Through their singing, Christians expressed their wholehearted gratitude “to the Lord” for His marvellous provision of salvation.

Christ-Centered Hymns. While in the synagogue the singing was “word-centered,” that is, designed to praise God by chanting His Word; in the New Testament church the singing was “Christ-centered,” that is, designed to extol Christ’s redemptive accomplishments.

A good example of a “Christ-centered” hymn is found in 1 Timothy 3:16, which consists of an introductory sentence (“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion”), which is followed by six lines:

He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated in the Spirit,
seen by angels,
preached among the nations,
believed in the world,
taken up in glory.

This hymn embodies in a cryptic way the fundamental truths of the Gospel message. As Ralph Martin explains, “By a series of antithetical couplets in which a second line complements the thought of the first line, the Gospel message . . . is set forth. It treats of the two world orders, the divine and human; and shows how Christ has brought together the two spheres by His coming from the glory of the Father’s presence into this world (‘revealed in the flesh’: cf. John 1:14; Rom 8:3) and by His lifting up of humanity back again into the divine realm. Thus heaven and earth are joined, and God and man reconciled.”²⁷

The celebration of Christ’s redemption is the basic theme of other New Testament hymns (Phil 2:6-8; Col 1:15-20; Heb 1:3), and especially in the book of Revelation, where the angelic choir around God’s Throne sings a new song saying: “Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God, from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God” (Rev 5:9-10). The “Christ-centered” singing done by the church on earth reflects the “Lamb-centered” singing done by the living creatures in heaven.

A Pagan Witness. A most telling evidence of “Christ-centered” singing by the early church is found in the private correspondence between the Roman Governor Pliny and the Emperor Trajan. In a letter written in A. D. 112, Pliny reported to the emperor that he tortured some young Christian deaconesses in order to find out what possible crimes were committed by Christians in their religious gatherings.

To his surprise, Pliny found that “The sum total of their guilt or error amounted to no more than this. They had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately among themselves in honor of Christ as if to a god, and also to bind themselves by oath, not for criminal purpose, but to abstain from theft, robbery and adultery, to commit no breach of trust and not to deny a deposit when called upon to restore it.”

What an inspiring pagan testimony about early Christian worship! Christians became known for singing to “Christ as if to a god,” and for binding themselves to follow His example in their lifestyle of purity and honesty. It is evident that the main theme of their songs was Christ. They witnessed for the Lord by singing about Him and living godly lives in His honor.

The witness of the New Testament singing is relevant for us today. Is our singing “Christ-centered” like that of the apostolic church? Does our church music praise the Savior for His past, present, and future redemptive accomplishments? Does it give us a greater appreciation for Christ’s creative and redemptive love?

If you are tempted to listen to rock music, ask yourself: Do the beat, rhythm, and lyric of this music help me to appreciate the purity, majesty, and holiness of Christ? Does it magnify His character? Does it have appropriate words, a pure tone, and a lovely melody? Music about Christ should be like Christ, reflecting the purity and loveliness of His character.

No Instrumental Music in the Early Church. None of the New Testament references to music make any allusion to musical instruments used by New Testament

Christians to accompany the singing. Apparently, Christians followed the tradition of the synagogue in prohibiting the use of musical instruments in their church services because of their pagan association.

Undoubtedly, Paul understood that music could be an effective resource to help the church fulfill the overwhelming tasks of evangelizing the Gentiles. He knew what would work in attracting people. He says: "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom" (1 Cor 1:22). But he chose not to use Gentile or Jewish idioms to proclaim the Gospel. Why? Because he wanted to reach people, not by giving them what they wanted, but by proclaiming to them what they needed. "But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Gentiles, Christ is the power of God" (1 Cor 1:23-24).

The outright condemnation of musical instruments, sometimes even of the harp and the lyre, is present in the writings of numerous early Christian authors. In his dissertation on *Musical Aspects of the New Testament*, William Smith concludes his survey of the critical attitude of church leaders toward the use of musical instruments by listing several reasons. The first three are as follows: "(a) Most important of all, at least ostensibly, seems to be the association of instruments with the worship of heathen cults. (b) The employment of instruments at secular excesses as the theater and the circus. (c) The sensuality of instrumental music and its aesthetic effects."²⁹

Contrary to the current philosophy that rock music can be adopted and adapted to reach the secular society, the early Christians distanced themselves not only from secular songs but also from the musical instruments used for secular entertainment and pagan worship. In his book *The Sacred Bridge*, Eric Werner concludes his study of music in the early church: "Up to the third century, the Christian sources reflect almost the same attitude toward Hellenistic music as contemporary Judaism. The very same distrust of instrumental accompaniment in religious ceremonies, the same horror of flute, *tympanon* [drum], and cymbal, the accessories of the orgiastic mysteries are here in evidence."³⁰ The same point is emphasized by the *The New Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* in its description of the early church: "The ban on dance in the worship service shows that rhythm did not have much of a place in the liturgy."³¹

We cannot approve the early Christians' radical rejection of all musical instruments for church services simply because they were used by the pagans in social and religious life. Yet we must commend them for recognizing the danger of bringing into the church the music and instruments which were associated with a pagan lifestyle.

The early church understood the fundamental truth that adopting pagan music, and the instruments used to produce it, could eventually corrupt the Christian message, identity, and witness, besides tempting people to fall back into their pagan lifestyles. Eventually this is what happened. Beginning from the fourth century when Christianity became the religion of the empire, the church tried to reach the pagans by adopting some of their practices, including their music. The result has been the gradual secularization of Christianity, a process that is still continuing today. The lesson of history is clear. To evangelize people with their secular idioms, ultimately results in the secularization of the church itself.

DANCING IN THE BIBLE

The final question we wish to address is that of dancing in the Bible. Historically the Seventh-day Adventist church has maintained that the Bible does not sanction dancing, especially in the context of the worship service. In recent years, however, the question has been reexamined, especially by Adventist youth leaders who claim to have found biblical support for dancing.

Shall We Dance? A good example of this new trend is the symposium *Shall We Dance? Rediscovering Christ-Centered Standards*. This research was produced by twenty contributors and is based on the findings of the "Valuegenesis Study." This study

is the most ambitious project ever undertaken by the Adventist church to determine how well the church transmits its values to the new generation.

The back cover of *Shall We Dance?* indicates that the book is “jointly sponsored by the Department of Education of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, the John Hancock Center for Youth Ministry, La Sierra University, and La Sierra University Press.” The combined sponsorship by four major SDA institutions suggests that the content of the book reflects the thinking of major Adventist institutions.

There are the four chapters devoted to dance and written by four different authors. The conclusion is that “Dance is a component of divine worship. When we study Scripture we find that what it says about dance and dancing is not only *not* condemnatory, but in some cases positively prescriptive: ‘Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with timbrel and dance; praise him with strings and pipe’(Ps 150:3-4).”

The passage continues: “A half hour with a good concordance leaves the lingering impression that there is more to a truly Biblical perspective on dance than has previously met our Adventist eyes. Of some 27 references to dance (dance, danced, dances, dancing) in the Scriptures, only four occur in a clearly negative context, and even these references nowhere describe dancing as the object of God’s displeasure.”

This chapter presents this surprising challenge to the Adventist church: “As challenging as it is to our notion of respectability and decorum, it seems evident that Adventists should give new thought and study to the inclusion of dance as part of the worship of God, at least in selected communities and on special occasions.”

Three Major Flaws. After spending not “a half hour” but several days examining the biblical data relevant to dance, I find this conclusion unsubstantiated and its challenge unnecessary. For the sake of clarity, I wish to respond to the position that “dance is a component of divine worship” in the Bible by submitting what in my view are the major flaws of this position.

The view that dance in the Bible is a component of divine worship, rests largely on an unwarranted interpretation of Psalms 149:3 and 150:4 where we find the invitation to praise the Lord “with dancing.” For many people these texts provides the strongest biblical support for religious dancing in the church and social dancing outside the church.

The reason is that if dancing in the Bible is a component of divine worship, then it must be accepted also as a legitimate form of social entertainment. This popular assumption is based on a superficial reading and inaccurate interpretation of the two texts in question. Furthermore, this assumption ignores the consistent exclusion of any form of religious dancing in services of the Temple, as well as the nature of social dancing in Bible times, which was radically different from the romantic dancing of today.

Linguistically, the translation of the the Hebrew term *machowal* as “dancing” in Psalm 149:3 and as “dance” in Psalm 4, is disputed. Some scholars believe that *machowl* is derived from *chuwl*, which means “to make an opening”¹—a possible allusion to a “pipe” instrument. In fact this is the marginal reading given by the KJV. Psalm 149:3 states: “Let them praise his name in the dance” [or “with a pipe,” KJV margin]. Similarly Psalm 150:4 reads: “Praise him with the timbrel and dance” [or “pipe,” KJV margin].

The marginal reading of the KJV is supported by the context of both Psalm 149:3 and 150:4, where the term *machowal* occurs in the context of a list of instruments to be used for praising the Lord. In Psalm 150 the list includes eight instruments: trumpet, psaltery, harp, timbrel, string instruments, organs, cymbals, clashing cymbals (KJV). Since the Psalmist is listing all the possible instruments to be used to praise the Lord, it is reasonable to assume that *machowal* also is a musical instrument, whatever its nature might be.

Another important consideration is the figurative language of these two psalms, which hardly allows for a literal interpretation of dancing in God's House. 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 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.

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 is it intended to give a license to dance for the Lord 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 dance, or to play drums in the church, is to misinterpret the intent of the Psalm and to contradict the very regulation which David himself gave regarding the use of instruments in God's House.

No Dancing Music or Instruments in the Divine Service. David was the founder of the music ministry at the Temple. He 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).

The two instruments that accompanied the Levitical choir were 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."² Great care was taken to ensure that the vocal praise of the Levitical choir would not be overshadowed by the sound of the instruments.

Percussion instruments associated with dancing such as timbrel, tambourines, or drums, were never allowed in the religious services of the Temple. Why? Not because their sound was evil per se, but because these instruments were commonly used to produce entertainment music which was inappropriate for worship in God's House. By prohibiting instruments associated with a dancing style of music, the Lord taught His people to distinguish between the sacred music played in the Temple, and the secular, entertainment-style of 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). The cymbals were used to mark the transition between stanzas.

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.

Social Dancing. A survey of the twenty-eight references to dance in the Bible indicate that dance in the Bible was essentially a social celebration of special events, such as a military victory, a religious festival, or a family reunion. The dances were either processional, encircling, or ecstatic. They were done mostly by women and children.

There are no biblical indications that men and women ever danced together romantically as couples. As H. Wolf observes, "While the mode of dancing is not known in detail, it is clear that men and women did not generally dance together, and there is no real evidence that they ever did." Furthermore, as noted earlier, dance in the Bible was never done as part of the divine worship in the Temple, synagogue, or early church.

The dances mentioned in the Bible were done at social events with religious overtones, because they often took place within the context of a religious event, such as annual festivals. They could be compared to the annual carnival celebrations that take place today in many Catholic countries, with colorful dancing. No Catholic would consider such dances as part of the worship services.

The same is true for the various types of dances mentioned in the Bible. Men and women danced, not romantically as couples but separately in processional or encircling dances. In view of the religious orientation of the Jewish society, such folk-type dances are often characterized as religious dances. But there is no indication in the Bible that any form of dance was ever associated with the worship service in God's House.

An important distinction must be made between religious music played for entertainment in a social setting and the sacred music performed for worship in the Temple. We must not forget that the whole life of the Israelites was religiously oriented. Entertainment was provided, not by concerts or plays at a theater or circus, but by the celebration of religious events or festivals, often through folk dancing by women or men in separate groups.

Those who appeal to the biblical references to dance to justify modern romantic dancing inside or outside the church ignore the vast difference between the two. Few people would be interested today to participate in the folk dancing mentioned in the Bible, simply because there was no physical contact between men and women. Each group of men, women, and children did its own "show," which in most cases was a kind of march with rhythmic cadence.

In Ethiopia, where numerous Jewish customs have survived, including Sabbathkeeping, I witnessed "The Dance Around the Ark" by the Coptic priests. Frankly, I could not understand why they called it "dance," since it was merely a procession by the priests who marched in a circle with a certain rhythmic cadence around the ark. To apply the biblical notion of dance to modern dance, is misleading to say the least, because there is a world of difference between the two.

CONCLUSION

Seventh-day Adventists believe that we live today in the final countdown to the great controversy between true and false worship, as described in book of Revelation through the imagery of a beast that promotes the false worship of Babylon. This apocalyptic prophecy envisions the antitypical Babylon leading all the nations into the false worship of God (Rev 13:16; 14:8; 18:3).

To appreciate the apocalyptic imagery of the false worship promoted by Babylon, it is important to note that this imagery derives from the historical chapter of Daniel 3—a chapter that describes an event of prophetic endtime significance. On the Plain of Dura, all the inhabitants of the Babylonian empire were called to worship the golden image of king Nebuchadnezzar. A fiery furnace was prepared for those who refused to do homage to the golden image. Daniel informs us that “every kind of music” (Dan 3:7, 10) was used to cause all classes of people from all the provinces of the empire to corporately worship the golden image (Dan 3:10).

Twice in Daniel 3 there is a long list of the different musical instruments used to produce “every kind of music” (Dan 3:7,10). This eclectic music was played to induce people to worship the golden image. Could it be that, as in ancient Babylon, Satan is using today “every kind of music” to lead the world into the false worship of God? Could it be that many Christians have come to love “Christian rock” because it sounds very much like the music of Babylon? Could it be that rock music will play a significant role in promoting the endtime false worship, which promotes self-gratification, rather than God’s glorification?

This would not be the first time in Scripture that music has been used to promote false worship. At the foot of Mount Sinai music and dancing were involved in the worship of the golden calf (Ex 32:19). In the plains of Moab, on the borders to the Promised Land, the Israelites were “beguiled with music and dancing” into a terrible apostasy (Num 25:1-2). They were lured through music to participate in heathen worship—something which they may have resisted under other circumstances.

It is impossible to estimate the global impact of rock music on the moral and religious values of mankind. Its open rejection of the Christian faith, and its promotion of a new religious experience characterized by rhythmic music, sex, drugs, and dance, could well prove to be the most effective medium used by Satan today to lead mankind into the final apocalyptic false worship of self-gratification.

The summon of the Three Angels Messages to come out of spiritual Babylon by rejecting its false worship, could well include also the rejection of the rock music of Babylon. Soon the whole world will be gathered for the final apocalyptic showdown of the Plain of Dura and “every kind of music” will be played to lead the inhabitants of the earth to “worship the beast and its image” (Rev 14:9). It is noteworthy that in Revelation the outcome of the showdown involves the silencing of the music of Babylon: “So shall Babylon the great city be thrown with violence, and shall be found no more; and the sound of harpers and minstrels, of flute players and trumpeters, shall be heard in thee no more” (Rev 18:21-22).

Those who reason that there is nothing wrong with the music of Babylon may be conditioning themselves to accept the false worship promoted by Babylon—a worship based on self-gratification rather than God’s glorification. Could it be that by adopting the music of Babylon, some will miss the chance to sing the New Song of Moses and of the Lamb? May this question resonate in our consciousness and challenge us to stand for the true worship of God like the three Hebrew worthies. May the music we use for private entertainment and public worship reflect our commitment to glorify God with all our heart, mind and soul.

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