

Answering Some Questions On Music

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

The story behind each newsletter is fascinating. What I end up mailing to you is often much different than what I had originally planned. This newsletter is no an exception. I was planning to post an essay by Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, Ph.D, Director, Public Campus Ministries for the Michigan Conference. His essay is entitled "Gospel Gimmicks: The Foolishness of Preaching or the Preaching of Foolishness." It is an insightful essay taken from his latest book MUST WE BE SILENT? Most likely I will post it in the next newsletter.

What caused me to change my mind was the rereading of some of your comments about the last newsletter on "Biblical Teachings on Music." I felt that in good conscience I could not ignore them. Thus I began to respond to some of your comments, without realizing that my response became a full length newsletter.

Your comments have made me forcefully aware that music is becoming one of the most divisive issues in our Adventist churches today. Reading your comments has been for me a learning and maturing experience. Among other things, it has helped me to see the need to become more pastoral in my approach toward those who use beat types of music for church worship.

Let me share with you an example of a timely advice received from Fred Vasenius, a Mechanical Engineer who subscribes to our newsletter. He wrote: "May I suggest that the next time you witness an irreverent rock band in a church, you try to arrange a conversation with them and find out what their experiences with the church were that led them to getting involved in that type of worship. Also, it may be best to avoid preaching to them until you have earned their trust.

"People from my generation can be suspicious. If they believe that you have taken the trouble to understand them, you will have a lot more credibility and you will probably be better able to find a solution. A person who identifies a problem but doesn't understand it properly is not much better than one who doesn't see a problem at all."

There is much wisdom in Fred's words. We need to understand what causes fellow believers to adopt "Christian" versions of rock music for worship. In some cases the problem may be, not so much an addiction to the rock beat, but a reaction to a worship service that does not meet their spiritual needs.

One of the drawbacks of my itinerant ministry, is the lack of time for getting to know people more closely and listening to their concerns. Usually I arrive at a church on Friday afternoon and leave early on Sunday morning. This leaves me only with the Sabbath hours which are so filled with speaking engagements that leave little time for open interaction with people. Many questions are usually raised on Sabbath afternoon during the questions/answers period, but the time available is too short to deal in depth with the issues raised.

In this newsletter I would like to take few moments to interact with two pastors who have expressed some legitimate concerns. One pastor, Roger Hernandez, is from the USA and the other pastor, Brian Sterley, is from South Africa. I have chosen to comment on their "critical" comments, rather than on the many "positive" messages received, because they reflect a genuine pastoral concern to help me become more understanding of the music issue. I am always willing to listen to fellow believers who manifest a genuine desire to help me grow in the understanding of how to minister to the

spiritual needs of people. I always welcome constructive criticism, because I am not infallible, though I come from Rome, Italy.

A THANK YOU NOTE

Before addressing the comments of these two pastors, I need to mention few items of general interest. First, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to the many of you who told me how much you appreciated the last Bible study on "Biblical Teachings on Music," which was excerpted from chapter 7 of THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC. Some of you told me that you printed out this Bible study and shared it with your friends and church members.

Several of you have shown your appreciation for this timely research, by ordering a case (26 copies) of the book THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC to distribute to members of your congregation. The study on "Biblical Teachings on Music" was taken from chapter 7 of this book. If some of you missed the opportunity last time to order this timely book, you can still order it by calling us at (616) 471-2915. Note that you or your church can order a case of 26 copies of THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC for only \$170.00, postage paid even for overseas. This means that by the case the price is only \$6.50 per copy, instead of the regular price of \$20.00 per copy.

Among the many notes of appreciation received, the one that especially touched me came from Jack Blanco, Ph. D., recently retired Chairman of the School of Religion at Southern Adventist University. He wrote "Praise the Lord for your book on music!" Then he asked me to mail him urgently 32 copies of the book, which he donated on graduation day, last May 4, 2001, to each of the graduating theology students. These messages of encouragement mean a lot to me. They help me to forget the "hate mail" coming from those who are unable to disagree without becoming disagreeable.

COVER LETTER FOR *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*

Several churches in recent weeks have ordered my book *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE* by the case to donate to their local ministers. If your church has ordered the book and has requested a cover letter to attach to the book, I am pleased to inform you that I finally found the time to write it. I apologize for being late in preparing this cover letter. Feel free to contact me and I will mail or email you a copy immediately.

May I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to those churches and individuals who have sponsored the distribution of *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE* to the local ministers. As a result of this outreach, I am receiving very encouraging responses from ministers of different denominations.

These past few days I received two encouraging messages from ministers. One is from Pastor Doug Hogsten, who graciously wrote: "Thank you for your help. I want you to know that your books have been a great blessing to me and my family. I pastor an independent Apostolic Church and we have recently changed our service times in recognition of the Sabbath as a result of studying your material with Scripture.

The Lord bless you, Pastor Doug Hosten."

The second message is from Rev. Michael L. Burns, to whom I emailed several chapters of *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*. He wrote: "Thank you for your quick reply. We will be sending an order on Friday for a case of *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*. I found the chapters that you sent me to be a treasure trove of reference material. They could not have come at a more appropriate time. In June, our Summer Institute will be on Sabbath Theology and I believe your book will be an asset to our students. We already use several of your books as study and reference.

May God continue to bless your ministry.

Yours in Christ's Service,
Rev. Michael L. Burns"

One of the most gratifying aspects of my ministry of Biblical research, is to see how the Lord can use the printed page to help people understand and experience more fully biblical truths. Messages like the above, encourage me to continue my ministry of researching and sharing biblical truths.

If your church wishes to sponsor copies of *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE* to your local ministers, please note that for such worthy project we offer the book by the case of 32 copies for the basic cost price of only \$190.00, postage paid, that is, \$5.90 per copy, instead of the regular price of \$20.00. Feel free to call us at (616) 471-2915 for a supply or further information.

POPE JOHN PAUL LATEST TRIP

Several subscribers to our newsletter have asked me to comment about Pope John Paul II latest six days pilgrimage to Greece, Syria, and Malta. My comments will focus on the global mission this present Pope.

John Paul turns 81 this month. By undertaking this latest trip in spite of his precarious health condition which impedes his movements and speech, John Paul reveals his determination to press on to the very end of his pontificate in fostering ecumenical understanding and cooperation among people of all religions under the moral and spiritual leadership of the papacy. His vision is to become the undisputed spiritual leader of mankind. To achieve this objective, he has traveled more than all the previous popes of history put together. He continues to do so, in spite of his failing health.

John Paul sees himself as a man called to serve as the spiritual leader not only of his own church but of the whole of mankind. To gain global acceptance, John Paul is willing to mend fences by asking forgiveness for the past sins committed by the Catholic Church against the Moslem, Protestants, Jews, and Greek Orthodox.

In recent years special conferences have been organized by the Pope to examine the dark chapters of Catholic history such as the crusades against the Moslem and the heretics (Albigences, Waldenses, Hugonots), as well as the inquisition against the Protestants. The outcome of these conferences has been an open admission of the grievous sins committed by the Catholic church in the past against people who refused to accept her dogmas.

This latest trip was no exception. To calm Orthodox anger that has seen nuns and monks taking to the streets of Athens to protest at the visit of a man they dub the "arch-heretic," Pope John Paul asked God on Friday, May 4, 2001, to forgive Roman Catholics for a 1,000 years of sins against Orthodox Christians. Deep animosity still remains over the A. D. 1204 sacking of Constantinople, which was the seat of the Eastern Greek Church, by Crusaders sent by the powerful Pope Innocent III to free Palestine from the Muslims. Instead of sailing to Alexandria, Egypt, and proceed to Palestine, the Crusaders were diverted to Constantinople and, after a siege, captured the city in 1204, establishing a Latin Kingdom ruled by the Pope until A. D. 1261. The Greeks have never forgotten that the Pope treated them like infidels, by conquering and subjugating them for almost 60 years.

Fully aware of this embarrassing chapter of papal history and of the awful action of Roman Catholic Crusaders against their Greek brethren, John Paul said: "For occasions past and present, when the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church have sinned by actions and omission against their Orthodox brothers and sisters, may the Lord grant us the forgiveness we beg of Him."

The positive effect of the Pope's plea for forgiveness was immediately felt. Greek Archbishop Christodoulos, who had grudgingly gone along with the Pope's visit but refused joint prayers, immediately burst into applause. The two men later embraced. Afterwards, the Archbishop told reporters: "I am very happy. The Pope was very nice to us, but of course there are still problems between our two churches that we have to face."

The recent papal apologies to Moslem, Protestants, and now Greek Orthodox, reflect, in my view, not only a recognition and confession of the terrible past sins committed by the Catholic Church, but also a calculated strategy to enhance the Pope's role as the moral and spiritual leader of mankind. John Paul understand only too well that to clear the way for him to gain global acceptance, it is necessary for him to apologize to those people the Catholic Church has mistreated in the past.

Another important element of the papal strategy, is the adoption of a policy of benign tolerance toward non-Catholics. Paradoxically, while the Pope is intransigent toward Catholics by expecting them to uphold traditional church discipline and teachings,

he is now tolerant and open toward outsiders. Protestants, for example, have been rehabilitated from heretics, to “separate brethren,” and now to brothers and sisters in Christ. Similarly, members of world religions are now treated with openness and respect.

This new Catholic attitude of tolerance and respect toward outsiders, is obviously paying back dividends in terms of good will and admiration toward Catholics and their Pope. By adopting, what Jesuit Professor Vernon Ruland calls “The Catholic Double Standard” [*The Christian Century* (Dec 16, 1981), p. 1311], the Pope is successfully gaining global acceptance. The “Catholic double Standard” consists of strict intransigence toward Catholics and “benign tolerance toward outsiders.” From Catholics the Pope expects uncompromising adherence to the official church teachings. From outsiders the Pope expects them “to strive sincerely to live according to their conscience.” By adopting this double standard the Pope is succeeding admirably today in being widely accepted as the Papa urbis et orbis, the spiritual Father of Rome and the world.

Social analysts describe with surprise this radical change of attitude on the part of Protestants, Orthodox, Muslims and other non-Christian religions toward the Pope and the Catholic Church. As Seventh-day Adventists we should not be surprised by this change of attitude toward the Catholics, because for 100 years we have announced to the world, on the basis of our interpretation of Biblical prophecy, that the gulf of separation between Catholicism and other religions would eventually be bridged (GC 588).

SEMINARS WITH NEW POWERPOINT PRESENTATIONS

Last January 5, 2001, Pastor Donald Mackintosh invited me to present my Sabbath Enrichment Seminar at his Three Angels SDA Church in Wichita, Kansas. On the way from the airport to his church, he shared with me how he was using effectively his PowerPoint presentations for group Bible studies. By the time we reached the parking lot of the church, Don opened his Mac laptop (you would expect him to use a Mac computer that promotes his own name, Mackintosh) while still sitting in his car and showed me some of his PowerPoint Bible studies. He immediately made a believer out of me. He convinced me that my seminars on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian life-style, would be twice as effective, if I were to deliver them with all the visual effects that can be achieved with a PowerPoint program.

Being a late comer into the computer scene, it took me few months to finalize my decision to invest into a good laptop computer and a projector. Last week, with the help of a student who taught me how to use the basic features of the PowerPoint and Photoshop programs, I spent over 50 hours in preparing my first PowerPoint lecture on "My Search for the Sabbath at a Vatican University." It was time consuming to find all the pictures of the places and documents related to my Vatican experience. The project is not completed yet. I will soon make a trip to Rome to take digital pictures of places and documents relevant to my testimony.

Last Friday evening, May 11, 2001, I presented for the first time my testimony at the Spring Branch SDA Church in Houston, Texas, with the help of 55 PowerPoint slides. The response was overwhelming. The church that can seat about 350 persons, was packed with twice as many people. In spite of the congested situation, the people were very attentive as I showed to them all the significant places and documents that touched my life. What a thrill to take the congregation by means of PowerPoint pictures through the Vatican, the Gregorian University, the libraries, the Waldensian sites, and show the places and documents that impacted on my search for biblical truths.

At the end of the presentation, several people urged me to try to deliver my next two lectures on Sabbath morning and afternoon with PowerPoint slides. The young man in charge of the sound/video equipment, offered to spend the whole night in putting my next two lectures on a PowerPoint format, if I would supply him all the needed information. Unfortunately, this could not be done because much of the visual material needed for the presentation, was not yet available.

This past week I spent countless hours putting together my second lecture on "The Sabbath Under Crossfire: A Look at Recent Sabbath/Sunday Developments." Usually, I deliver this informative lecture on Sabbath afternoon. This presentation will consist of about 100 PowerPoint slides, dealing with all the significant texts, documents, people, and places mentioned during the lecture. Truly, I am excited at the possibility of adding a dimension of visual realism to my presentations.

During the next few days I will intensify my efforts to place as many presentation as possible on a PowerPoint format before we leave on Sunday, May 27 for a week-long evening presentations at the Carolina campmeeting, held at Lake Junaluska. This is a new experience for me. I am excited at the thought that now I can help people, not only to hear, but also to see the beauty of the timely Biblical truths which are part of our Adventist message. With the help of some computer experts, in the near future I plan to place on my web site all my PowerPoint presentations.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the seminars for the months of May and June 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 4-5: PATTERSON AVENUE SDA CHURCH IN RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

Location: 3901 Patterson Avenue, Richmond, Virginia 23221
For information call Pastor Robert Banks at (804) 270-1456

MAY 11-12: SPRING BRANCH SDA CHURCH IN HOUSTON, TEXAS

Location: 1614 Bingle Road, Houston, Texas 77055
For information call Dr. Cesar Puesan at (281) 405-8833

MAY 27 TO JUNE 2: CAROLINE CONFERENCE CAMPMEETING

Location: Lake Junaluska in North Carolina
For information call the Carolina Conference office at (704)596-3200

JUNE 15 TO 23: WISCONSIN CAMPMEETING

Location: Camp Go Seek
For information call Wisconsin Conference office at (608) 241-5234

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ANSWERING SOME QUESTIONS ON MUSIC

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

This newsletter differs from all the previous ones because it consists primarily of my response to two perceptive messages received from two Adventists pastors, one living in the USA and the other in South Africa. I have chosen to respond to these two messages for two reasons. First, because they were written in an irenic spirit by pastors who are passionately involved in ministering to their congregations. They express concerns about my previous Bible study on “Biblical Teachings on Music.” I feel that these concerns need to be addressed. Second, I have chosen these two messages because they reflect the thinking of many people that the style of church music is largely a question of cultural and personal taste.

The first message is from Pastor Roger Hernandez, who pastors three congregations, each different from the other, when it comes to style of worship. Since his message is short, I will quote it in its entirety.

“Dear Dr. Bacchiocchi:

I had a call from a member who had missed church for three Saturdays in a row. The reason given is that the Church is irrelevant, music is out of touch and boring. He said that we are living in the 21st century not the 16th. I bet you will not post this message in your newsletter.

By the way, I really like your book on the Sabbath. Your material on other issues is also good. However, this music crusade you are on, needs to allow for different points of view. I pastor a contemporary church, a traditional church, a middle of the road church, each one with a different styles that reaches different people. It is working for me. I see God working in all the three churches.

God bless,
Your friend,
Pastor Roger Hernandez”

It may come as a pleasant surprise to Pastor Hernandez to discover that I posted his message, contrary to his expectations. I have no problem with posting messages from those who disagree with me, as long as they are written in a respectful way.

THE MUSIC IS BORING AND THE CHURCH SERVICE IS IRRELEVANT

Let me comment first of all on the member who stayed away from church because the music was boring and the service irrelevant. It would be interesting to follow Fred’s advice given at the beginning of this newsletter, and find out why this member finds the music and the service boring, irrelevant. Could it be that the problem with such members lies, not with the hymns or service, but with the new appetite that they have developed for pop music? Could it be that such an appetite has so dulled the musical sensitivity of some people that they are no longer able to appreciate sacred music and an ordinary church service? A spiritual appetite must be developed before one can enjoy spiritual music, but this does not happen overnight.

The problem, however, is not always a perverted appetite. Sometimes traditional hymns seem dull because the congregational singing is lifeless. I have been in churches where the singing and the preaching were monotonous and sad, more appropriate for a funeral service, than for the praise of God’s creative and redemptive love. The solution to this problem is to be found, not in adopting the sound of secular music, but in finding a dynamic and spiritual song leader who can inspire the congregation to sing wholeheartedly. The same hymn that sounds dull when sung in a monotonous way becomes vibrant and inspiring when sung with enthusiasm.

Hymns become meaningful to the congregation when all participants—the song director, the minister, the accompanist, and, of course, the congregation—awaken to the enormous blessing which awaits them as they sing from the heart with great dedication and concentration.

To help in this process, attention can be called to the author of the words of the hymn, or to the composer of its music. Some significant aspects of the hymn's message can be brought out, and then one can invite the congregation to sing the hymn with fresh meaning and understanding.

Imaginative changes in the manner of singing can make even familiar songs more interesting. Sometimes the song leader can invite the congregation to sing acapella. One verse can be sung by women and another by men. In other instances the congregation can accompany the choir, singing group, or soloist. There are endless ways of singing old hymns with new fervor and excitement.

I wish you could have heard the singing last Sabbath at the Spring Branch SDA Church, in Houston, Texas. It is a young congregation of about 500 members. On the platform there are 18 flags of the nations represented by the congregation. During the past 12 months, the Pastor, Dr. Caesar Puesan, has conducted only one funeral, because the congregation consists primarily of young adults, many of whom are successful professionals. I sat at the table on the Sabbath with four medical doctors, and a computer engineer, besides the pastor.

The singing was vibrant and enthusiastic. On the first row there was a band of about 15 young people, accompanying the singing with their brass ensemble. The hymns were all taken from the hymn book and projected on the screen. By this I do not mean to imply that contemporary songs not found in the hymn book should not be used. There are indeed contemporary songs suitable for worship. It was a source of inspiration to witness such a young congregation singing so passionately to the Lord. The point I am trying to make is that traditional hymns do not need to be boring. They can be sang in a vibrant and enthusiastic way.

But, what if the singing and church service is boring? Is that a legitimate excuse for staying away from church? The answer is "NO." We go to church not to seek for self-gratification, but for God's glorification. Sometimes the church service may be boring. I listened to sermons that were distressing to me because of the lack of logic and biblical understanding. Yet, even in those situations, I try to make the worship experience meaningful.

ADVENTIST MUSIC SHOULD REFLECT ADVENTIST BELIEFS

The complaint that traditional Adventist hymns are boring and consequently needs to be replaced with pop music to enhance worship, ignores the theological presuppositions that should undergird the worship experience of Adventist believers. Some Adventist worship leaders are pushing for the adoption of pop music in Adventist worship services strictly on the basis of personal taste and cultural considerations. But the music and worship style of the Adventist church cannot be dictated solely by subjective tastes or popular trends. The prophetic mission and message of the church should be reflected in her music and worship style.

The music and worship style of most Adventist churches is largely based on uncritical acceptance of the worship style of other denominations. In his book *And Worship Him*, Norval Pease, my former professor of worship at the Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, states: "We are Adventists, and we must approach worship as Adventists. A worship service that meets the needs of Methodists, Episcopalians, or Presbyterians may be unsatisfactory for us."

The answer to the Adventist worship renewal is to be found, not in the adoption of religious rock music, but in a reexamination of how our distinctive Adventist beliefs should

impact the various parts of the church service, including music. It is important to remember that music is like a glass prism through which God's eternal truths shine. Through church music, a whole spectrum of biblical truths can be taught and proclaimed. Throughout church history people have learned through music the great truths of the Christian faith and the claims of Christ upon their lives.

In an attempt to bring about worship renewal, many evangelical churches today are adopting religious rock songs on the basis of personal taste and cultural trends rather than on clear theological convictions. The result is that some popular songs sung during church services have an inadequate or even heretical theology oriented toward self-satisfaction.

The choice of appropriate church music is crucial especially for the Seventh-day Adventist church, because through her music she teaches and proclaims the end-time truths entrusted to her. Regretfully, the music and worship style of most Adventist churches is largely based on the uncritical acceptance of the worship style of other churches.

To provide a theological basis for the choice and performance of music during the worship service of Adventist churches, I have submitted some reflection in chapter 6 of THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC on the implications of the Sabbath, Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, and the Second Advent. I have found that each of these three distinctive Adventist beliefs contributes in its own unique way to the definition of what church music should be like.

While researching for my book IMMORTALITY OR RESURRECTION? I was surprised to discover even in our own SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST HYMNAL, few hymns which have been influenced by the dualistic mentality that views the material world down here as bad, and the spiritual realm up there as good. How often we are asked to view this present life as a "weary pilgrimage" and to look for the eventual escape to heaven, "up above the sky."

Examples of hymns that manifest hostility toward this earthly life, religious escapism, and other-worldliness easily can be found in the hymnals of most Christian denominations. Some hymns portray this earth as a prison from which the believer is released to ascend to the heavenly home: "My Father's house is built on high, Far, far above the starry sky; When from this earthly prison free, That heav'nly mansion mine shall be." Other hymns describes the Christian as a stranger who can hardly wait to leave this world: "Here in this country so dark and dreary, I long have wandered forlorn and weary." "I'm but a stranger here, Heaven is my home; Earth is a desert drear, Heaven is my home." "I want to live above the world . . . on heaven's tableland."

Christians who believe the words of such hymns may be disappointed one day to discover that their eternal home is not "above the world . . . on heaven's tableland," but down here on this earth. This is the planet that God has created, redeemed, and ultimately will restore for our eternal habitation. The Biblical vision of the world to come as this Planet earth restored to its original perfection, needs to find expression in our hymns. After all this is the Biblical realistic view of the world to come.

I find it incomprehensible that most of the hymns we sing today were written by pioneers who lived a century ago, in a different social and theological context. Has the inspiration to compose new songs that articulate our hope and faith, long dried up? One of the last great hymns that I can think of was composed in 1962 by Wayne Hooper for the General Conference session. It is entitled "We have this Hope." It is a powerful hymn that stirs my soul. Why is it that very few new hymns like this one have been composed and added to the hymnal in recent years?

The reason can hardly be the lack of musicians and composers, because we have an abundance of them in the Adventist church today. Could it be that Adventist musicians see no need to compose new hymns, since most Adventist churches prefer to use the contemporary Christian music already available. Unfortunately, some of this music does

not articulate our Adventist beliefs. Furthermore, some songs consist of simple choruses more suitable for a kindergarten Sabbath School, than for a mature congregation. Why not challenge our Adventist poets and musicians to compose new songs that fittingly express our faith and enrich our worship experience?

CHURCH MUSIC IS A MATTER OF PERSONAL PREFERENCE

Pastor Hernandez appeals to me “to allow for different points of view” regarding church music. As a case in point he cites the three churches of his own district, where one uses contemporary music, another traditional music, and the third one something in-between. He believes that “God is working in all the three churches,” and consequently various forms of music should be allowed.

The fact that God works in all the three churches of Pastor Hernandez, does not mean that the worship music of each of the three churches is equally acceptable to God. Christ blessed with His presence the homes of publicans and sinners, but that does not mean that He endorsed their lifestyle.

The issue of what constitutes appropriate church worship, should not be resolved on the basis of culture, personal taste, traditional, or contemporary styles, but on whether the melody, harmony, and lyrics are designed for the worship of God or for social entertainment. We have seen in the previous Bible study (No. 68) that in the Temple, synagogue, and Early Church, the music and the instruments associated with entertainment were never allowed in the worship service. Believers in the past understood the distinction between sacred music for worship and secular music for entertainment.

The reason why today some fail to see such a distinction, is simply because we live in a secular society which has largely lost the sense of the sacred. For many, God’s Holy Day has become a holiday, the Church has become a place of entertainment, marriage has become a civil/social contract, rather than a sacred covenant. The same secularization process has influenced the adoption of secular music for the sacred worship of God.

It is important to remember that musical styles are not neutral, but value-laden. They embody our understanding of God and our relationship with Him. This is an important concept that I have explored in chapter 2 of THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC. The study shows that ultimately the battle over music styles is a theological battle over our understanding of God. Rock music today, both in its secular and “Christian” version, reflects an immanent “God within us” perception. This view of God promotes a strong physical and emotionally stimulating music by means of repetitive rhythms in order to achieve a direct contact with or experience of the divine.

Ultimately, what is at stake in the battle over music is the understanding of the very nature of God being worshipped. The question is: Does the church music serve to worship the holy and transcendent God of biblical revelation or a casual, personal-lover type of Being created by human imagination? The debate over this question is intense and will not go away because, intuitively, people sense that their music stands for the God whom they want to worship.

A PASSIONATE PLEA TO LOVE OUR YOUNG PEOPLE IN SPITE OF THEIR REBELLIOUS LIFESTYLE

A deeply moving, passionate plea to love and accept our young people, in spite of their rebellious lifestyle, was sent to me by Pastor Brian Sterley, who is currently serving as a pastor at our Helderberg College Church in South Africa. I read and reread several times his four page letter, which he chose to send through the Post Office. What impressed me about this letter, is the fact that it is written by a pastor who has committed his life to reach our young people, no matter how far they have walked away from God. I can only thank God for men like Pastor Sterley who fulfill such a vital outreach ministry.

Before addressing the major concerns expressed by Pastor Sterley, let me allow him to introduce himself. He wrote: "I am a Seventh-day Adventist minister, 47 years of age. I have been in the ministry now for 26 years. Fourteen of those years were spent in youth ministry. Four years at conference level and nine years at Union level. I have traveled quite a bit in Africa, Australia, and Europe. I have covered the USA from coast to coast. I have attended many Adventist youth meetings and camps. I am presently the pastor at our Helderberg College Church. I have been here for the last six years."

In the light of his impressive background, Pastor Sterley appeals to me to be more patient and tolerant toward our young people who live a different lifestyle, often at odds with the standards of the church. He wrote:

"My dear Dr. Bacchiocchi, this is not the first time that music has become an issue—it has always been an issue, and will remain an issue because people do not and will not agree with all the music played. My sons cannot listen to the Heralds singing. I do not think they are wrong—I think they are different, and have a different tastes of music than what I have. Trying to please everybody is impossible . . .

"Our youth are faced with many more challenges than when we were young. We should be patient with them and in love try to lead and guide them. Not all our young people (including one of my sons) are good obedient-towing the line SDA's [sic]. Not all our young people are conforming to our standards . . . The church is the body of Christ, it is also the bride of Christ, including those 'hippie-styled' Adventist bands in Germany. They are blood bought souls of God's Kingdom. They are your brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. They are part of the bride of Christ.

"Why is it that we want everybody to conform to our way of thinking. We have this compulsion to want to press everybody into our mold, and if they do not quite fit we reject them and write e-mail about them, and all they are trying to do is to build the kingdom of God in their own way. . . .

"You can talk all you want about the theology of music in the Bible, but a lot of that is cultural. Let us not try to be specific about music in the Bible, but use the basic principles. Dr. Bacchiocchi, do not get me wrong here please. I am not condoning what is happening in a few Adventist churches around the world, but let us in love move with our young people, allowing them space to exercise their faith in ways which may be different to the way we used to do it.

"At one camp where I was the guest speaker they had somebody rapping up front there. Afterwards someone asked my opinion about the 'music.' Well, I plainly said, that I did not like it. However, I did not walk out of the meeting or act impulsively, but I tried to do things in a mature way realizing that young people have to grow as we all do."

I have quoted several paragraphs of Pastor Sterley's letter, to help readers better understand his passionate plea for tolerance, compassion, and love toward our youth. His plea needs to be heard and accepted. We can hardly expect to win our young people by assuming a judgmental, critical attitude toward them. We need to win them to ourselves, before we can win them to Christ.

I fully support and try to emulate Pastor Sterley's tolerance and compassion toward young people. For 31 years I have taught college age young people, first at the Ethiopian Adventist College (5 years) and then at Andrews University (26 years). Through the years I have learned to be patient and compassionate especially toward those young people who clearly displayed a nonconformist attitude. During the past few years I have seen young people coming to my Bible classes with painted hair, chains around their neck, and metal rings hanging in various parts of their body, including nose and lips. I have had to deal with students who failed to come to class because they got drunk the night before. I have never dismissed students or castigated them for their appearance or behavioral problems.

But, being tolerant and compassionate, does not mean that we must ignore their behavioral problems, hoping that someday they will grow up and get over them. Sometimes they will, but often they don't. Our responsibility as spiritual leaders is to help them understand in a caring, loving way why their behavior is morally wrong.

THE PROBLEM OF MORAL RELATIVISM

My conviction is that we cannot blame people, whether young or old, for doing what is wrong, if we do not help them to see what is right. The problem we are facing in our church today could be called "moral relativism ." The assumption seems to be that there are no longer moral absolutes. The distinction between right and wrong is often perceived to be a matter of personal choices or cultural traditions.

The most common question I face in my itinerant ministry is: "What is wrong?" What is wrong with going to church with revealing clothes? (Last Sabbath as my wife and I were standing in front of our University church, we could not help but note some ladies entering church with dresses held by shoulders-strings. They would have never been allowed to enter in a Catholic Church). What is wrong with buying food and services on the Sabbath? What is wrong with dancing? What is wrong with moderate drinking? What is wrong with pre or extramarital sex? Moral relativism has blurred the distinction between right and wrong.

Moral relativism is reflected also in the discussion on rock music. Some argues that they see nothing wrong in using "Christian" versions of rock music for church worship and personal entertainment. It is simply a matter of taste and culture. Apparently you support this view by your comment: "I do not think they are wrong—I think they are different, and have a different tastes of music than what I have."

Your moral relativistic seems to be derived from your view that the Biblical teachings on music are culturally conditioned and consequently not applicable to us today. You wrote: "You can talk all you want about the theology of music in the Bible, but lot of that is cultural. Let us not try to be specific about music in the Bible, but use the basic principles."

Lessons From the Temple Music

Let me assure you, Pastor Sterley, that this is exactly what I have tried to do in my investigation of the Biblical teachings on music. I have attempted to distill the principles that are applicable to us today. The Bible teaches us moral principles, not only by precepts, but also by examples. For instance, the way the levitical music ministry was organized and conducted in the Temple, can be very instructive for us today. We noted in the previous Bible study (No. 68) that we can learn three significant lessons 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, tell us that the Temple music, contrary to what you say, was counter-cultural. The example of the Temple 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.

ROCK MUSIC IS NOT MORALLY NEUTRAL

Apparently you believe that there is nothing wrong with the use of rock music by some of our young people, because rock music is morally neutral. “I do not think they are wrong—I think they are different, and have a different tastes of music than what I have.” Your view, Pastor Sterley, is shared by many youth pastors, including some of our church leaders. Some of them have published articles in our church papers, which I have examined in the book.

This view that rock music is neutral ignores the nature and effects of this music on the body. I would urge you to read **THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC** where several scientific studies are cited. They show that the rock beat can alter the mind and cause several physical reactions, including sexual arousal. One of the experiments was conducted by an Adventist Norwegian Professor, Tore Sognefest, on his own students. He reported the results of his experiments in chapter 8 of the book.

The factual information available on the nature and effects of rock music makes it abundantly clear that such music cannot be legitimately transformed into Christian music by changing its lyrics. In whatever version, rock music is and remains a music that embodies a spirit of rebellion against God and the moral principles he has revealed for our lives.

By stimulating the physical, sensual aspect of the human nature, rock music throws the order of the Christian life out of balance. It makes the gratification of the carnal nature more important than the cultivation of the spiritual aspect of our life. By consciously striving for a physical impact, “Christian” rock reduces spiritual truths to a physical experience. Listeners are deceived into believing that they had a spiritual encounter with the Lord, when in reality that experience was only physical excitement.

Christians should respond to rock music by choosing instead good music that respects the proper balance among melody, harmony, and rhythm. The proper balance among these three reflects and fosters the order and balance in our Christian life among the spiritual, mental, and physical components of our beings. Good and balanced music can and will contribute to keep our “spirit and soul and body . . . sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:23).

WE NEED TO STRENGTHEN THE MORAL CONVICTIONS OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

In my view, Pastor Sterley, our greatest need today is to strengthen the moral convictions of our young (and older) people. The stronger are their moral convictions, the greater will be their capacity to resist the social pressure to compromise. Helping our young people to understand the moral principles that God has revealed in His Word, must be our priority. This must be done with love and compassion.

Teaching our young people moral principles, can hardly be viewed as an act of persecution. I am not sure to what you refer when you wrote: “Let us take it easy and work in love and PATIENCE with our young people. Let us not persecute them as they did in the middle ages. In those days they fled to the mountains to escape persecution.

Today our young people flee from our churches and homes because of the persecution. In the dark ages they died by the sword, today our young people die by the e-mail.”

Apparently you feel that the Bible studies that I am emailing to thousands of people around the world, have the effect of driving our young people away from the church. You wrote: “I am afraid that mail such as you are putting out will only drive our young people away. Let us work with them.”

Let me assure you that I share your commitment to work with them. But, I believe in working with them by helping them understand how to internalize and live out the moral principles that God has revealed. Please note that much of Christ ministry was devoted to teaching people how to follow Him in their daily lifestyle.

The many email messages I receive from young people in different parts of the world, hardly suggest that my e-mail Bible studies is driving them out of the church. I wish that you could read the many messages received from young people telling me that after reading THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC, they decided to dispose of all their rock CDs. Wherever I go there are many young people who appreciate the efforts of a Bible scholar who helps them to understand and experience more fully Biblical truths. Every weekend there are young people and young adults who drive several hours to attend my seminars. Many of them have a deep hunger for a deeper understanding of the teachings of the Word of God.

Things may have changed in South Africa since my last two visits several years ago. But, I fondly remember interacting with many of our young people. The first time I came to South Africa I spoke to capacity crowds in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Durban, and Johannesburg. In Cape Town the 2000 seats “Three Arts Theater” was packed to capacity. A riot almost broke out outside because hundreds of people could not come in. To calm them down I offered to repeat my presentations the next day, Sunday, in a different location. I received the same reception during the second visit in conjunction with the Sabbath Conference sponsored by the University of South Africa.

Some South African brethren are working now to bring me back to South Africa this coming November 2 to 11, 2001. I look forward to another blessed experience of Bible study and fellowship with our young and older fellow believers in South Africa.

Let me assure you, Pastor Sterley, that I believe in our Adventist young people. Incidentally the Lord has blessed our home with three children, two sons and a daughter. Each of them is actively involved in the church. My wife deserves much of the credit for bringing up our children in the fear of God, because all too-often I have been away or too busy with pressing deadlines.

During my Bible teaching career I have seen radical changes in the life of our young people as a result of teaching them the principles of God’s Word. Let me use an example to illustrate this point. Drinking has become a major problem in our schools, necessitating counseling centers. In view of this fact, I decided to devote each quarter a week (four lectures) on the “Bible and Alcohol.” In the four lectures I shared the highlights of my book WINE IN THE BIBLE—a book that has been favorably reviewed by scholars of different persuasions. This research, which has engaged me for two years, clearly shows that the Bible teaches total abstinence, and not moderation.

The impact of these lectures became evident during the devotional exercise at the beginning of the class, when students publicly admitted that for the first time they became convinced of the sinfulness of drinking and consequently they poured down the drain the cans of beers or the bottles of wine they had in their dormitory rooms.

We can hardly expect young people to give up alcohol and drugs, if we do not help them to see the moral and medical implications of using these substances. The same applies to rock music. There are many Adventist young people who are uncomfortable

with it, but listen to it because of peer pressure. But when we help them to see the negative effects on their mind, body, and soul, some of them will take a stand against it.

Since my retirement last July 1, 2000, I have been invited several times by young people to share my research on music. In fact, even the Andrews University ministerial club of about 60 students, invited me recently to deliver this lecture. The response was very gratifying. Most of the students purchased a copy of the book at a reduced price. I would love to share my research with our students at Helderberg College. I have reasons to believe that their response would not be different from the one received in other colleges. The fact is that many of our young people want to be educated in all areas, including the Biblical teachings on music.

WHAT SHOULD A PERSON DO WHEN ROCK MUSIC IS PLAYED FOR WORSHIP?

In your letter, Pastor Sterley, you mention that you were a guest speaker at camp meetings (Western Australia) where the music was not of your taste, but you did not walk out. "At one camp where I was the guest speaker they had somebody rapping up front there. Afterwards someone asked my opinion about the 'music.' Well, I plainly said that I did not like it. However, I did not walk out of the meeting or act impulsively, but tried to do things in a mature way, realizing that young people have to grow as we all do."

Presumably your comment is a veiled reference to the incident when I walked out of a youth tent at an Australian campmeeting because I found the music very offensive. Let me reassure you, Pastor Sterley, that what happened that night was very unusual. I went by mistake to the wrong youth tent. I was looking for the "CONNECTION" tent of the young adults, but my mistake I entered the youth tent. I was not scheduled to speak that evening. I had just arrived and I wanted to explore the tent where I would be speaking the next day.

When I discovered that I was in the wrong tent where the rock band was wild, I left and went to the CONNECTION tent where I was to start speaking the next morning. I sat down there through the evening meeting, though some of the music played there was very offensive to me. At the end of the meeting I did ask the leader not to plan for any rock music before my speaking the next morning. He found my request unreasonable, and eventually they rescheduled me to speak at 1:00 p. m. during the lunch break without any music. Surprisingly the tent was full and the response was overwhelming.

You might be interested to know that before that incident I spoke for eight days at the South Queensland Campmeeting, where every night the tent was packed with 3000 to 4000 people. Elder Chester Stanley, who at that time was the President of the South Queensland Conference, told me when he took me to the airport, that the night attendance at the campmeeting was the best they ever had. Incidentally, I spoke there too also to the youth and the young adults, and we had no problems. No rock music was played before my presentations.

The incident I just reported is unique, because it is the only time I walked out of a meeting because of the offensive music. In my itinerant ministry around the world, numerous times I have sat on the platform through church services where the beat music was so loud that I felt an acute pain in my eardrums,—a pain that lasted for several days. It is not my practice to walk out of a service any time I find the music offensive. On the contrary, I prefer to stay and use the opportunity to help our fellow believers understand the distinction between sacred music for worship and secular music for entertainment. This can be done in Christian love, without being offensive.

My experience has been that our people appreciate the efforts of a Bible scholar who is willing to help the congregation understand more fully Biblical truths. The problems we are facing today in the church service with beat music, puppets, drama, dancing, magic, and other forms of "Gospel Gimmicks," largely derive from leadership, not membership. This was true in ancient Israel and it is still true today.

CONCLUSION

It has been for me a maturing experience to prepare this newsletter as a response to the comments of both Pastor Roger Hernandez and Pastor Brian Sterley. Though I disagree with some of their comments, I have been inspired by their commitment to minister, especially to those who live a different lifestyle, often at odds with the standards of the church. I have heard and accepted their plea for tolerance, compassion, and patience. Indeed, I will pray for a larger measure of divine grace and wisdom in relating to those who promote and practice a different worship style and lifestyle.

My own plea to those of us called to be spiritual leaders, is to lead in accordance to the principles of the Word of God. We face today enormous pressure of cultural conformity—pressure to give to people what they want. May we resolve by God's grace to give to our people what they need. Above all, may all of us learn to speak the truth in love.

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