

COME WITH *Singing*

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Making Music

SOME SCHOLARS SAY music began when man made music because his dawning appetite for emotional communication and artistic expression . . . demanded satisfaction. (*A History of Music*, p. 4)

But wait. God says music rang out when He created the earth. To celebrate the laying of earth's cornerstone, "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7).

Music, then, existed before man. Music came from God.

SOUNDS OF MUSIC

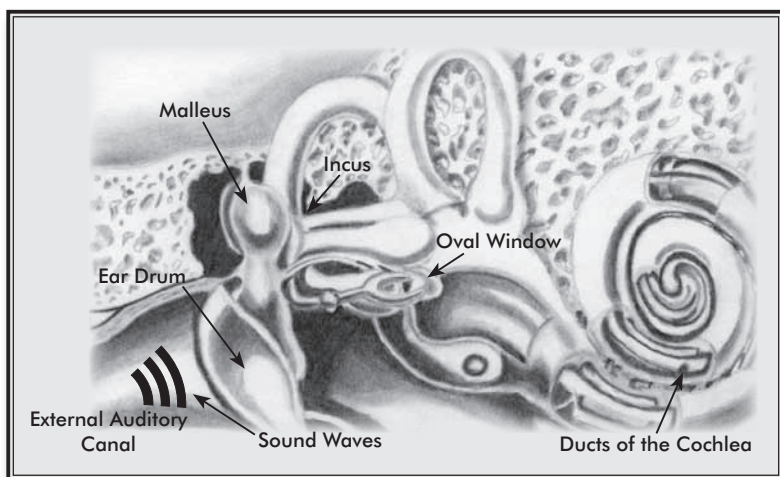
Regular vibrations of sound possess musical qualities. Each note of the scale has its own personality, which comes from its number of vibrations in relation to other notes. And musical chords, which are differing tones sounded simultaneously, have more potent personalities than single notes. Using chords, musicians have crafted thousands, if not millions, of expressive harmonies.

God packed all this potential into music for His pleasure and our profit. When we use music according to the purposes He had in creating it, He is pleased and we prosper both emotionally and spiritually.

Chapter 1

YOUR MUSIC EQUIPMENT

The abilities of the human voice say, “God made me to sing.” It is the most versatile of all musical instruments—and the least understood. Your voice can likely sing comfortably over a span of more than an octave. Sound is born in your vocal chords—folds of membrane that vibrate from air blown past them from the lungs. The tension of the chords determines the pitch of the sound. The resonating chambers in your throat, mouth, and nasal passages give the sounds further shape. With this equipment, you can make all the vowel sounds in a range of several octaves.¹



Your ears are your brain’s microphones. Vibrating air molecules travel down your ear canal until they hit your eardrum. Just beyond your eardrum, the vibrations jiggle a tiny mechanism that presses against the cochlea, where an audience of 14,000

¹ I say vowel sounds because the tonal sounds in singing are basically vowels. The consonants are inserted very quickly at the ends of tones.

receptor cells is waiting, ready to fire sound signals through 32,000 nerve fibers to your brain. The brain then recognizes and analyzes the sound. While hearing music, your ears self-adjust to screen out body sounds like heartbeat and to keep the decibels within your comfort zone. They perceive the relationship between tones and the varying types and degrees of harmony. As we age, we can expect our ability to hear high pitches and to distinguish between pitches to decline. But loud noises assault the inner ear and cause premature and drastic loss of hearing. Our Creator gave us this delicate hearing equipment so that we can receive the blessings of music into our inner man.

THE ORIGIN OF MUSIC

The Bible tells us that when God created Adam, he knew how to talk. Picture how broad his understanding of language had to be to name every animal. Although the Bible does not say so, I believe that Adam also knew how to sing from the beginning. Quite likely his understanding of music was just as broad as his understanding of language.

With the rise and fall of civilizations since Adam, people have lost and regained both language and music skills. Many of the scholars who study those contours are evolutionists, and they seek to prove that both music and men have evolved over the ages.

Scholars of music have commonly believed that our seven-note scale evolved from primitive scales of two, three, and four notes. They usually honor the Greeks as the first to use a seven-tone scale. Then from the times of the Greeks, they trace the development of modern notation, harmony, and

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rhythm. Much of what they trace is historical fact. By listening to them, however, we could conclude that good music developed since the Dark Ages. Is that true?

Did those who established the essentials of our music discover something new or recover something old? Let's examine some archaeological evidence that sheds light on this question.

In the 1950s, archaeologists found on the coast of Syria three fragments of a clay tablet with musical notation. Some call this cuneiform tablet from around 1400 B.C. "the oldest sheet music in the world." Being a pagan hymn to a moon goddess, the lyrics do not interest us. But the musical notation does. It is based on a seven-note scale. Their scale had two half steps where ours does, one between the notes MI and FA and the other between TI and high DO. This is evidence against the theory that western civilization developed our seven-note scale in recent centuries.

Another evidence is the archaeological discovery at the city of Ur—in which Abraham had lived—of a wind instrument dating circa 2800 B.C.

Its state of preservation allowed the conclusion that the sounds it was designed to produce indeed correspond (approximately) to the seven traditional, normally spaced notes of our scale. Recently discovered Babylonian tablets confirm the theory of this heritage. (Suzanne Haïk-Vantoura, *The Music of the Bible Revealed*, p.184)

A similar discovery was made with the wind instruments of Egypt.

When Egyptologists recently made playable replicas of flutes found in Pharaoh's tombs, they found that the

flutes produced much the same sequence of scale tones we use in the West today. (Robert Jourdain, *Music, the Brain, and Ecstasy*, p. 69)

Reportedly, the Chinese, who believe their classical music hailed from the third millennium B.C., had a scale of twelve notes. And, significantly, the scale they commonly used had seven.² The story of Indian music, which seems to have existed as early as 400 B.C., is similar. It too builds on a seven-note foundation.³

Suzanne Haïk-Vantoura, who has researched extensively the musical notation in ancient Hebrew Scripture, says,

The modes of Bible melodies which resurrect from my deciphering are the most common ones from the antiquity to the present. These modes were known in ancient Greece and are still used in our religious and secular songs of Europe and Israel, from the most ancient times to today.

She goes on to explain that the diatonic seven-note (heptatonic) scale made up of whole and half steps

is the only scale used in Biblical psalmody. (Suzanne Haïk-Vantoura, as quoted in *The Music of the Bible*, p. 325)

Who first used a seven-note scale? Only God knows. We do know that He sees seven as a complete number. He gave the rainbow seven colors and Adam a seven-day week; He also could have given him a scale with seven notes.

What we believe about how music began and developed influences how we view and use music. People who believe

² David Tame, *The Secret Power of Music*, p. 60

³ Ibid., p. 179

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The Chromatic Versus the Diatonic Scale

Surely in music class you sang, “DO, DI, RE, RI, MI, FA . . .” and on up the twelve notes of the chromatic scale. The five tones unique to the chromatic scale are more dissonant than the seven notes of the standard scale. They add color, hence the name chromatic. But they are not as stable and are used sparingly in vocal music.

Our seven-note scale is a diatonic scale. Dia means “through” and tonic refers to the keynote, DO, which is also known as the tonic tone. The six other tones relate the best harmonically to the tonic. They are determined “through the tonic” (diatonic).

music evolved *from* man and *with* man logically believe music *belongs* to them, and they feel free to use it as they please. Since they believe man and his music are both evolving, they anticipate that the music of tomorrow will surpass that of today. They repeatedly update their musical equipment and crave fresh albums. They expect modern music to take them beyond where the old has left them.

But music’s basic tenets are not evolving. The music of tomorrow—a

new beat, a new harmony, or a new recording—will not supply something for the child of God that the godly music of yesterday has failed to do.

WILL MUSIC END?

The first music in the universe rang with purity and beauty in accord with the purity and beauty of God. Soon Satan twisted God’s beautiful music to serve his own ugly purposes. Genesis 4:21 reports the rise of musical development among

the (presumably godless) descendents of Cain with these words: “Jubal . . . was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ.” Ever since, the carnality of ungodly people has driven them to continue twisting music into grotesque forms. The ear-shattering off-beats, cries of tension and misery, and expressions of immorality and violence of modern music make us wonder: has the world’s music ever been this bad? And will it get any worse?

In the Judgment, God will purge the world of vile music. The last specific mention of music in the Bible declares the end of music in Babylon, the world’s anti-God culture. “The voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all” (Revelation 18:22).

But God’s music will flow on for eternity. The Bible specifies neither a beginning nor an end to music. Because of sin, the whole creation now groans and travails. But the psalmist pictures the Lord as He comes to judge the earth and its inhabitants as being welcomed with music and great rejoicing (Psalm 98). The apostle John saw victorious souls in glory, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps and singing the song of Moses and the Lamb.

I’ll praise my Maker while I’ve breath,
And when my voice is lost in death,
Praise shall employ my nobler pow’rs;
My days of praise shall ne’er be past,
While life, and thought, and being last,
Or immortality endures.

—Isaac Watts,
from “I’ll Praise My Maker”
(*Church Hymnal*, 7)

What Should We Do With Music?

SOME MUSIC CALMS PEOPLE, as David's music did King Saul. On other occasions, music arouses whole nations. Some sing, and people worship the singers. Others sing, and people worship the Lord. Music moves soldiers to bravery, punks to immorality, and the godly to worship. What does music do for you?

More importantly, what *should* it be doing for you? What does God want music to work in you?

I'm taking for granted that you are a Christian wanting to base your life on the New Testament. That's where we will get the questions of this chapter answered. In three places, the New Testament gives specific direction on how music should be used. Let's study those three passages now.

USE MUSIC TO EXPRESS GODLY SENTIMENTS

James 5:13 contains the simplest New Testament directive on music, and it is addressed to Christians as individuals. It says, "Is any merry? let him sing psalms."

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People in all cultures sing their values, their aspirations, their attitudes, and their experiences. Our music opens a window to our soul.

Out of the fullness of the heart,
The language of each mortal springs;
If you would truly know a man,
Just listen to the songs he sings.

John Paul Raber,
from "Listen to His Song"
(*Songs from Within*, 42)

According to James 5:13, Christians should not be an exception to this rule. We should sing our holy feelings, specifically our joy.

An early church leader wrote,

We cultivate our fields, praising. We sail the sea singing hymns. (Clement of Alexandria, as quoted in David Bercot, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, p. 348)

A Cornish miner, Billie Bray, sang freely at work. Unconverted co-workers were convicted by his strains and threatened to put him in a barrel and shut the lid. He replied, "If you do that, it can't stop this song, for I would have to praise the Lord out of the bung-hole."

Even in hardships and suffering, Christians express joy. One Christian couple who found themselves without food in the house stuck their heads into the empty flour barrel and sang the Doxology. The *Martyrs Mirror* tells of four Christian men who were sentenced to death in Austria, in 1546. Each was leaving a wife and children, but "when they were being led out to the slaughter, they boldly and joyfully sang" (Thieleman J. van Braght, *Martyrs Mirror*, p. 475).

What Should We Do With Music?

Many of us hear music of some kind every day in our homes, on the job, or in the grocery store. But seldom do we hear the simple kind commanded in James 5:13. Christians, seize the challenge.

If you are in good spirits, full of joy and goodness,
So that your lips overflow,
Then give expression and exclaim it.

—*The Ausbund*, song 1,
(as translated in *Songs of the Ausbund*)

Notice below how similar are the other New Testament passages that contain commands about music.

Be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:18, 19)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Colossians 3:16)

Both of these passages are directed to Christians—those full of the Spirit and inhabited by the Word of Christ. The Spirit and the Word within give the Christian a new song and guide his singing.

USE MUSIC TO BUILD UP GOD'S PEOPLE

Speak to yourselves in your singing. In other words, as you sing, be communicating more than just emotion. Teach truth. Admonish the careless and erring. For teaching to occur, there must be learning. So receive truth too.

One who thoroughly studied the use of music in Bible times concluded,

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In the New Testament as well as in the Old Testament the ultimate goal of singing is the presentation of the Word of God. (Garen L. Wolf, I, *Music of the Bible in Christian Perspective*, p. 31)

Music communicates powerfully. During the Reformation, singing may have done as much as the reading of the New Testament to stir the populace. According to Christian Neff, the songs Anabaptists composed in dungeons and sang on the scaffold “became the strongest attractive force for the brotherhood.” (*Mennonite Encyclopedia*, p. 791)

Of six thousand English Protestants singing together in the 1500s, it was said,

This sadly annoys the mass-priests and the devil. For they perceive that by these means the sacred discourses sink more deeply into the minds of men, and that their own kingdom is weakened and shaken at almost every note. (Albert Edward Bailey, *The Gospel in Hymns*, p. 12)

Singing affects us in ways speech cannot. And God wants us to use the power of music to share His truth.

Some time ago my family had dinner with my grandfather, who was eighty-seven and a widower. After we had eaten together the meal he had prepared, he began to sing,

There is a land of pure delight,
Where saints immortal reign . . .

And we joined in. By leading that hymn, he told us his focus, hope, and sense of coming to life’s end. He taught us. Are you being taught and admonished through music?

USE MUSIC TO EXALT GOD

Two of the passages we are considering end with the same three words. Both command us to sing “to the Lord.” While our singing is to make a horizontal impact, it must maintain a vertical focus. Around A.D. 248, Origen, a church leader, said of early church singing,

We sing hymns to the Most High alone and to his Only-Begotten, who is the Word and God. (Bercot, *Dictionary*, p. 349)

Christian singing should both glorify God and lift our minds and hearts to Him. The lyrics of our songs should reflect the dignity and majesty of God’s character and draw our lives to flow with His character.

God is worthy of all the praise we can sing to Him, for He has “created all things, and for [His] pleasure they are and were created” (Revelation 4:11). The song John heard being sung to Christ tells of His worthiness with these words: “Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood” (Revelation 5:9).

In eternity we will continue singing to the Lord. Revelation 15 pictures the redeemed in heaven offering the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb to Him.

The New Testament purpose for music can be summed up with three *E*’s: (1) *expressing godly sentiments*, (2) *edifying the church*, and (3) *exalting God*. The Holy Spirit within moves us to do this. He gives us happiness to express. He gives us the desire to edify our brethren. And through His power we crucify our proud flesh so that we can see God as the One worthy of all worship and praise.

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Use music according to the purposes of its Creator. Then the testimony of our generation will ring as clear as that described in the following paragraph.

Music in Biblical times was not considered an art, a thing of vanity and enjoyment in times of leisure, practiced by seekers of fame and fortune. It was clearly instituted for the preservation of man and the glory of God, and in this dual service its potentialities were realized and cherished. (*Music: Then and Now*, p. 35, as quoted in Wolf, *Music of the Bible*, p. 308)

Amid the pressing cares of life,
The pain, the greed, the sin and strife,
Despite the darkness closing in,
Grant us, oh Lord, a song within.

This world may sing its lilting lines,
Its clever verse and subtle rhymes,
But after all has fallen in,
One song remains, the song within.

Oh, Church of God, arise and sing
For Jesus Christ our risen King;
Let time and evil never dim
Our melody, our song within.

—John Paul Raber,
from “A Song Within”
(*Songs From Within*, 5)

The Sound of Our Songs

A BUILDER CAN TAKE raw materials like concrete and lumber and build a church or a bar. Likewise, a composer can take the raw materials of music and write music for either place. The raw materials of music are melody, harmony, and rhythm.

WHAT IS MELODY?

Melody is the tune—notes of varying length and pitch, sung one after the other. When we sing in unison, we sing the melody.¹

Melody uses the musical relationship of tones, together with varying durations and a beat pattern to trace a musical picture. A good melody stimulates mental activity. It impresses your mind and embeds itself in your memory. At times we hum the melody to help us recall the lyrics of a song.

WHAT IS HARMONY?

If you picture melody as traveling horizontally, picture harmony as notes stacked vertically. To make harmony, sound two or more tones simultaneously. It gives melody

¹ When both men and women sing the melody, the men sing an octave lower than the women. But the tones they sing sound almost the same because they are the same note, represented by the same letter on the staff. We still call it unison—one sound.

Personal Qualities of Notes

You may have learned in music class that DO is strong and restful, RE is rousing and hopeful, MI is calm and gentle, FA is inspiring and devotional, SOL is bright and happy, LA is sad and mournful, and TI is piercing and shrill. Can you sense the individual flavor of each note when you sing the scale? What gives notes emotional qualities?

It is not their pitch. Sounding a specified number of vibrations per second does not make a tone rousing or calm, sad or happy. Any pitch you can sing can become DO and sound DOish.

Here is how it works. When you call a pitch DO it becomes the home tone or key for all the other notes of the scale. As you sing the other notes, you do not hear them in isolation, but in their relationship to DO. That relationship gives each note its distinct impression.

When you sing a melody, you can sense the relationship-based flavor of tones. The flavors become much stronger when a group sings in harmony.

another dimension of beauty and, more importantly, another dimension of expression.

Tones that flow together (like DO and SOL) produce a consonant harmony. Those that grate against each other, DO and RE for example, are dissonant. Good harmony is not simply consonance, but the interrelating of consonance and dissonance. Harmony devoid of dissonance (like a piece written in all one-chords) is like a story without conflict or suspense.

Good melody and harmony both depend upon a tonal center. In music written in the major mode (like most of the songs we sing), the tonal center is DO. Major four-part harmonies

begin and end with the I chord (DO, mi, sol), of which the root is DO.²

DO is the tonal center for the whole piece of music. The I chord is the runway from which we leave to travel through the piece of music, and we return there to land. Returning to the I chord with the aid of a cadence tells us that we have finished our harmonic travels. The issues raised in the musical story have all been resolved. We are back home, and we know it. If we miss the home chord when we land, we crash harmonically, and we feel it.

Harmony super-charges the power of musical relationships and has tremendous potential to work in our emotions. Those who write music for movies and plays target the emotions, not the mind, and the sound tracks they produce are predominately harmony. They can move people to tension or tears, but can do little or nothing to impress their understanding.

WHAT IS RHYTHM?

Rhythm is the timed pulses or beats of music. The pace of a simple musical rhythm helps to keep a congregation singing together. It can also aid in expressing the lyrics (words) when accented beats emphasize key words.

Our bodies are sensitive to rhythm and respond to rhythm. An army can keep soldiers in step with the pronounced rhythm of marching songs. Rhythm is what may make our toes tap the floor when we sing.

Rhythm can affect more than just our toes, however. Our body seeks to synchronize its rhythms, like heartbeat and

² In their basic forms, chords consist of three notes and are called a triad. The chords are named by their root tone. For example, the root of the I chord is the first note of the scale, DO, and the root of the V chord is the fifth note, SOL.

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Cadences:

Harmonic Landing Strips

A harmony returns to its tonal center by way of a cadence. The most common is the authentic cadence that you find at the end of most songs. It is formed by moving from a V chord (SOL-ti-re) back to a I chord (DO-mi-sol). Note how the bass voice nearly always sings the root of these chords, SOL, then DO at the end of songs. The incomplete cadence (formed by a I chord followed by a V chord) returns the harmonies to their tonal center but clearly indicates the song will continue. The sound of the “amen” at the end of a song is the plagal cadence (formed by moving from a IV chord (FA-la-do) to a I chord (DO-mi-sol).

breathing, with those it senses outside the body. In a study at the Oxford University, the breathing rate of a person listening to fast music increased with the tempo to the point of hyperventilation. Probably no one fully understands how much external rhythms affect our bodies.

THE INFLUENCE OF MUSIC ON LIFE

The influence of music can be dramatic or subtle. It affects us, although we may not immediately notice it. A

secular author calls these unnoticed effects “the secret power of music.” It seems that all music exerts some kind of influence on living things.

God is life, and His music encourages life. In contrast, Satan is the destroyer. Music that produces sickness in body, soul, or spirit comes from him.

Researchers have studied music’s effects on living organisms. In the 1980s, two researchers at the Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey studied how music affects

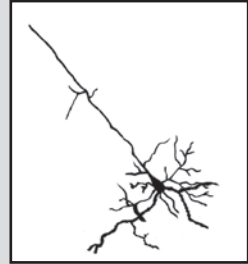
mice. They concluded this about mice which had listened to offbeat music more than three months:

Behaviorally, the animals displayed hyperactivity, learning disability and memory degradation. No such correlation or behavior was observed for musical stimuli with rhythmic components that were synchronized. (Gervasia M. Schreckenber and Harvey H., Bird in "Neural Plasticity of *MUS musculus* in Response to Disharmonic Sound," vol. 32, no. 2, fall 1987, p. 77)

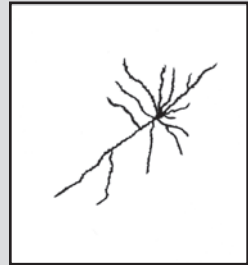
The results of this study are supported by similar research by a young man in Virginia. A group of twenty-four of his mice listened to rock music for three weeks, while another twenty-four heard classical music. A third group sat in silence. At the end of each week, he timed how long it took each group to find its way through a mouse maze. At the end of his study he said,

I found that both of the types of music had an effect on the mouse's ability to learn how to get through the maze. Classical music caused the mice to run faster, while Hard Rock music caused

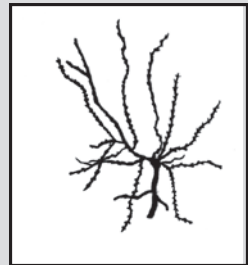
Dendrites of Mice in:



1. Control group. Relative quiet.



2. Harmonic group. Exposed continuously (day and night) for two months to rhythmically synchronized music since birth. Organized branching.



3. Disharmonic group. Exposed continuously to rhythmically non-synchronized music since birth. Abnormal branching.

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the mice to get dramatically slower. (David J. Merrell, *Music, Mice, and Mazes: "Changes Through the Ages,"* p. 8)

The order and balance of classical music contributed to the mental abilities of mice, whereas the jarring sounds and unpredictable rhythms of rock music impeded their ability to think. There is, of course, a vast difference between the brains of mice and men. But there are similarities too. Most likely, the damage done to mice demonstrates how disharmonic music will harm any living organism, including the human body. The researchers whose study I mentioned earlier also commented,

If an organism is the target of excessive, disharmonic stimuli, a number of stress mechanisms, involving both endocrine and neural feedback, are subsequently evoked by the body. . . . In fact, fluctuations and disturbances in pre-existing body rhythms have been correlated with many diseases like diabetes, renal and hepatic disorders, ulcers, cancer and circulatory abnormalities. (Riemann, 1963) (Schreckenbergs and Bird in "Neural Plasticity," pp. 81–82)

Studies have also shown the effects of tempo and volume on the human body. Our bodies find a tempo close to our heart rate soothing. Too slow a tempo builds suspense and, therefore, tension in our body. Too fast a tempo raises heart rate. Of the effects of volume it is said,

A three-year study of university students by investigators at Germany's Max Plank Institute showed that 70 decibels of noise consistently caused vascular constriction—particularly dangerous if the coronary arteries already are narrowed by arteriosclerosis. (*Medical World News*, June 13, 1969, p. 13, as quoted in David Tame, *The Secret Power of Music*, p. 141)

So far we have noticed how musical sound affects physical life. What does it do to our mind and emotions? Harmonic music can produce clarity, inspiration, and vigor; while disharmonic sounds often bring hostility, anxiety, and fatigue. Good music lifts us up, while music that fascinates the flesh wears us down. Just as the Bible says,

He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. (Galatians 6:8)

BUILDING SPIRITUAL LIFE WITH MUSIC

How must melody, harmony, and rhythm be used so that they build the church and not the bar? The church is a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). It appeals to man's spirit and tends to his spiritual needs. In contrast, the success of the bar hinges on its sensuality. It entices man's flesh with promises of physical pleasure.

If music is to build spiritual life, then melody, harmony, and rhythm must be in the right proportions. Just as an unbalanced diet can produce physical deformities, so unbalanced music can produce spiritual deformities. What is a healthful balance?

*Melody activates the mind,*³ the part of us that grasps spiritual truth. A wholesome melody conditions us to both receive and retain truth and to worship in spirit. Music that builds spiritual life has strong melody—strong enough that those singing or listening can follow it. The following Scripture pictures melody rising above any harmony or rhythm.

³ Allegedly ancient Greeks in their pursuit of intellectual development declared illegal the production of music that gave rhythm or harmony priority over melody.

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For the LORD shall comfort Zion . . . joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody. (Isaiah 51:3)

Harmony alters the emotions. Our emotions, or feelings, do not lead us into spirituality. They should rather follow our spiritual experience. The emotion of harmony should support—not overshadow—the message carried by the melody. Overpowering harmony obscures a song’s spiritual message.

A good harmony, from a Christian viewpoint, has moderate amounts of dissonance, and it regularly resolves the tension dissonance builds. Such harmony accurately portrays Christian experience. We have struggles. But in our struggles, our confidence in God endures, and He brings us through to stability and victory. Harmonies that build too much tension or do not adequately resolve it reflect a life at odds with God. Harmonies with too little tension tend toward a flat, superficial view of Christian living.

Rhythm affects the body. By calling for body involvement, a heavy beat dulls the spiritual appeal of a song. Syncopations and heavily repetitive beats build tension in the body and are more likely to produce mental resistance instead of receptiveness.⁴

The good solid tunes that stir the heart are not those that work the feet; if the depths of the spiritual nature are to be appealed to, it is not by tunes that cause the head to wag and the lungs to work like a blast furnace. (Charles Galloway, as quoted in Martin E. Ressler, ed., *The Music Messenger*, vol. 7, no. 6)

⁴ Some music interrupts its orderly beat pattern with off beats that shift the accent to an unaccented beat. When such off beats become regular enough to be anticipated, they are called syncopations.

The musical balance that builds spiritual life gives melody the predominate place, assigns harmony a lesser role, and keeps the rhythm subdued.

Music that builds spiritual life is simple in its melody, harmony, and rhythm. In Christian singing, music is the vehicle, the spiritual message the passenger, and human hearts the destination. Simple music is the best vehicle for delivering spiritual cargo.

Simple music enables whole congregations to sing together as the New Testament directs. Most people should be able to sing Christian music without a lot of special training. Of singing in the early church, Ignatius, an early church leader, said,

The psalm which occurred just now in the office blended all voices together, and caused one single fully harmonious chant to arise; young and old, rich and poor, women and men, slaves and free, all sang one single melody. . . . All the inequalities of social life are here banished. Together we make up a single choir in perfect equality of rights and of expression whereby earth imitates heaven. Such is the noble character of the Church. (Ignatius, *Letter to the Ephesians*, as quoted in Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old and New*, pp. 195–196)

Simple music need be neither boring nor slipshod.

Sacred music should be like the gospel, which commends itself, by its simplicity and sublimity, alike to the learned and the unlearned. (Charles Dingley, as quoted in Ressler, *The Music Messenger*, vol. 8, no. 2)

Lowell Mason, who did much to improve the quality of worship music in America during the 1800s, said,

One of the most important characteristics of a good psalm tune is simplicity . . . with respect to both melody

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and harmony, as shall render the design intelligible, and the execution easy. . . Let there be . . . simple, easy, and solemn tunes selected for . . . worship. (Lowell Mason, as quoted in Carol A. Pemberton, *Lowell Mason: His Life and Work*, p. 40)

Music that builds spiritual life harmonizes variety with order. God's creation contains boundless variety, especially when compared to assembly-line productions. Yet the variety in nature is contained within predictable structure. Trees possess

The Enduring Value of Simplicity

Editors working on a new hymnal queried several thousand pastors and congregations, to learn what hymns they sang most frequently. Consider the simplicity of the ten sung the most often.

*Come, Thou Almighty King
How Firm a Foundation
Holy! Holy! Holy!
All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name
In the Cross of Christ I Glory
The Church's One Foundation
Love Divine, All Love Excelling
Joy to the World
My Faith Looks Up to Thee
Master, Let Me . . . [Walk With
Thee]*

(Fredrick Hall, *Know Your Hymns Quiz-book*, p. 9)

same-ness because each is made of wood, roots, bark, and leaves or needles. This sameness gives us a perspective from which to view the variety we encounter in a forest, orchard, or tree-lined drive. Order without variety—like a white bowl filled with white Ping-Pong balls—is unnatural and boring. When we see variety lacking order—like a bowl filled with a Ping-Pong ball, a plum, a stone, and a spoon—we perceive confusion. We find beauty when we see variety constrained

by order—like a bowl containing bananas, apples, peaches, and pears. Throughout creation we can see the beauty of God harmonizing variety with order.

The natural law of variety within order applies to all aspects of music. While the variety that can be produced with four-part harmony has no limit, it must be constrained by a certain predictable order. Our bodies find constant, evenly accented beats stressful. It is order without variety. In contrast, we find beauty when we sing notes of varying duration to a steady

two- or three-beat pattern.⁵ Too many syncopations wreck rhythmic order. They clash with the character of God, His orderly creation, and the peace He gives His people.

Which Wolf

Does Your Music Feed?

An old Cherokee was teaching his grandson about life. "A fight is going on inside me," he told the lad. "It is a terrible fight between two wolves. One wolf is evil—he is anger, envy, lust, lies, greed, pride, self-pity, resentment, and selfishness. The other wolf is good—he is love, peace, joy, hope, humility, kindness, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. These two wolves are fighting within you. These two wolves are fighting within all other people too."

The grandson thought about all this for a moment. "Please tell me," he said, "which wolf will win within me?"

The Cherokee grandpa replied, "The one you feed."

Which "wolf" are you feeding with your music?

⁵ When a pattern contains four beats as in 4/4 timing, our minds break it down into two groups of two, with the first beat receiving a primary accent, and the third beat a secondary accent: ONE-two-three-four-ONE-two-three-four.

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For music to build, it must follow God's standard of doing all things "decently and in order." Its variety must be constrained by order, and its order colored with variety.

The Bible says, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh" (Galatians 5:17). This struggle takes place within us in the area of music as well. How can we determine whether the flesh or the Spirit will win in this all-important battle? The story in the gray box tells us.

Your lofty themes, ye mortals, bring,
In songs of praise divinely sing;
The great salvation loud proclaim,
And shout for joy the Saviour's name.

In ev'ry land begin the song;
To ev'ry land the strains belong;
In cheerful sound all voices raise,
And fill the world with loudest praise.

—Isaac Watts,
from "From All That Dwell Below the Skies"
(*Church Hymnal*, 10)

The Story of Congregational Singing

KING DAVID, THE GREATEST COMPOSER and singer of the Old Testament, lived a thousand years before the church was born on Pentecost. Nevertheless, he declared, “In the midst of the *church* will I sing praise unto thee” (Psalm 22:22, as quoted in Hebrews 2:12). According to him, church music had begun already in the Old Testament.

THE OLD TESTAMENT: SOUNDING THE FIRST NOTES OF CONGREGATIONAL SINGING

After the Israelites had safely crossed the Red Sea, they sang together the song you find in Exodus 15. Likely their collective music was of this spontaneous nature until four hundred fifty years later when David organized public worship.

David gave singing a prominent place in Israelite worship. When he brought the ark to Jerusalem, he scheduled songs to be offered before it continually (1 Chronicles 16:4–6). Following his orders, the chief Levites appointed musicians to sing and play musical instruments. They called 288 men to administrate music in public worship and appointed

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Chenaniah, a talented musician, to be the music instructor (1 Chronicles 15:16–22). The Levites who served in music found themselves so busy that they were released from their other Levitical duties (1 Chronicles 9:33). Eventually David had four thousand Levites appointed to praise the Lord with instruments (1 Chronicles 23:5).

The Book of Psalms was the hymnal of the Old Testament saints. They also sang, or chanted, other portions of Scripture; in fact,

Serious students of Jewish history agree that all Old Testament scripture was intended to be sung. (Garen L. Wolf, I, *Music of the Bible in Christian Perspective*, p. 21)



According to the Talmud, Jewish Scriptures were to be expounded to the hearers in a sweet, musical tune. It added that he who reads the Pentateuch without tune shows disregard for it

and the value of its laws, and that a deep understanding of the Torah is found only by singing it (*Music of the Bible*, p. 316). They sang Scripture for two reasons. First, with music they lifted Scripture to the attention and understanding of the hearers. In fact, the musicians were said to prophesy with music (1 Chronicles 25:1). Second, they praised the Lord with music, like the four thousand Levites mentioned in 1 Chronicles 23:5.

Musicians in the Old Testament did not seek to entertain their audience for

music in Biblical times was not considered an art, a thing of vanity and enjoyment in times of leisure, practiced by seekers of fame and fortune. It was clearly instituted for the preservation of man and the glory of God, and in this dual service its potentialities were realized and cherished. (*Music: Now and Then*, p. 35, Ashley Pettis, as quoted in Garen L. Wolf, I, *Music*, p. 308)

The lyrics of Old Testament music were not metered with a regular, predictable beat like ours. This lack of regular meter made it easy for the Israelites to sing any portion of Scripture. Their tunes simply flowed with the lyrics.

Did the Israelites Use Musical Notation?

One of the oldest manuscripts of the Hebrew Old Testament is the Masoretic Text. The scholars who hand copied it over the centuries included little symbols known as te'amim above and below the lines of text. But the scholars themselves were unsure of their meaning.

In the 1970s, Suzanne Haïk-Vantoura deciphered the individual symbols of the te'amim, showing them to be precise musical notation. The music she discovered is based on a seven-step scale much like ours.

No one knows who developed the Old Testament tunes or first put the notation in the text. Some, including Ga'on of Soura, who lived in the ninth century, believed that Moses received the te'amim on Sinai.

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THE EARLY CHURCH (A.D. 100–300): SINGING

TOGETHER OF CHRIST

Early Christians sang a cappella, everyone chanting the melody. At times the worship leader would sing a line, and then the group would repeat it in response. They also sang antiphonally by having a large group of singers sing a line and a smaller group echo it. Most likely, they borrowed all these customs from synagogue worship.

Little is known of the lyrics of the early church. Some historians believe that they sang Scriptural passages about the birth of Christ, such as “The Song of Mary” (Luke 1:46–55), “The Song of Zacharias” (Luke 1:68–79), “The Song of the Angels” (Luke 2:14), and “The Song of Simeon” (Luke 2:29–32). The poetic nature of 1 Timothy 3:16 indicates that this too could have been an early church hymn.

God was manifest in the flesh,
Justified in the Spirit,
Seen of angels,
Preached unto the Gentiles,
Believed on in the world,
Received up into glory.

Around A.D. 105, Ignatius (disciple of the apostle John and bishop of the church at Antioch) wrote of early Christian singing:

In your agreement and harmonious love, Jesus Christ is sung. You should work together as a choir, so that being harmonious in love and taking up the song of God in unison, you may with one voice sing to the Father through Jesus Christ. (David Bercot, *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, p. 348)

Pliny, a Roman governor from A.D. 111 to 113, said about Christians in a report to the emperor,

the substance of their fault or error was that they were in the habit of meeting on a fixed day before daylight and reciting responsively among themselves a hymn to Christ as a god. (Henry Betenson, *Documents of the Early Church*, as quoted in Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old and New*, pp. 51–52)

The early Christians also sang in daily life, while they worked or traveled. Around A.D. 50, prisoners jailed in Philippi once heard two bloodied Christians singing praises at midnight. Later, Clement of Alexandria, who wrote the original lines of “Shepherd of Tender Youth,” testified,

The Story of

“Shepherd of Tender Youth”

Some time between A.D. 202 and his death in A.D. 220, Clement of Alexandria wrote an instruction book for new converts. He concluded the book with a poem that began “Bridle of colts untamed . . .” The converts Clement instructed were not tender youth raised in the shelter of Christian homes but those who had lived hard, reckless lives and were learning to yield themselves to the staff of the True Shepherd. In his poem, Clement included several calls to sing, which indicate that he had his instruction class sing it.

In a sermon he preached in 1846, Henry M. Dexter, a Congregationalist minister in New England, used a paraphrase he had written of Clement’s poem. His paraphrase is our hymn “Shepherd of Tender Youth.” It enjoys the distinction of tracing back to the early church hymn with the oldest-known source. In Appendix A you will find a literal translation of what Clement wrote in Greek. You will likely be surprised at how different “Shepherd of Tender Youth” is from Clement’s song for new converts.

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We cultivate our fields, praising. We sail the sea, singing hymns. (Bercot, *Dictionary*, p. 348)

The early church faced many challenges to her simple worship of Christ. Persecution was one, and false doctrine was another. During the writing of the New Testament, the church faced pressure from Judaizers and pagan Gnostics. Soon afterwards, church leaders themselves began attributing magical powers to the rites of Communion and Baptism. The church was sliding downward; spiritual darkness was rising.

THE DARK AGES (300–1400): DIMMING THE FLAME OF CHURCH MUSIC

As the church apostatized, her worship became more ritualistic. In their apostate fear of apostasy, church authority began regimenting all expressions of worship. They developed a liturgy that prescribed word for word what was to be said and sung in each service.

Toward the beginning of this period, Arius, an influential minister in the church at Alexandria, preached that Christ was not eternal but was created by the Father. His bishop rejected his views and called a church council that denounced them as heresy. When the council at Nicea banished Arius to what is now Yugoslavia, he continued to propagate his beliefs by writing articles and setting his doctrines to popular folk tunes. The common people sang his songs wherever they went, not because they believed his doctrine, but because they enjoyed his songs.

In response to threats of this sort, the established church continued to limit its members' freedom to sing. For example,

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in A.D. 367, a council in the Eastern Church forbade the congregation to take part in the service and declared that only passages from Scripture could be sung.

In a more positive effort to counter the influence of Arius's music, some bishops began writing songs. Ambrose of Milan, one such bishop, contributed to church music by developing a simple, metrical hymn style.

Most of the ten thousand hymns composed in this period, however, were not written by bishops in ornate cathedrals, but by monks in austere monasteries. They composed hymns in Latin and Greek—languages most people did not understand. As unlikely as it may seem, you probably have sung English versions of some of these hymns (see box “Light From the Dark Ages”). In spite of asceticism and false doctrine and sacramentalism and liturgical formulas, the Catholic Church did contribute something to our church music during the Dark Ages.

In this period, small, scattered churches took issue with the abuses of the Catholic Church. In the 1100s one of their leaders declared

that by the bawling church singing of the priests and monks God is mocked, and not reconciled. (Henry of Toulouse, as quoted in Thieleman J. van Braght, *Martyrs Mirror*, p. 274)

History indicates that the light of Christian song burned brightly in these remnant groups. In one account, thirty believers who fled from Germany to England were sentenced to be branded in their foreheads and banished from the city of Oxford. Leading them to receive their sentence, their leader, Gerard, sang,

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“Blessed are ye,” says the Lord, “when men shall hate you, for my sake.” (Ibid, p. 295)

The darkest note in church music during this period sounded when the established church absolutely forbade its congregations to sing. The declaration of a church council in 1415 sums up the state of congregational singing at the end of the Dark Ages.

If laymen are forbidden to preach and interpret the scripture, much more are they forbidden to sing publicly in the church. (Webber, *Worship Old and New*, p. 198)

THE REFORMATION (1400–1700): REVIVING CONGREGATIONAL SINGING

The church council in 1415 that ordered laymen to silence in public worship also ordered the burning at the stake of the leader of one of the persecuted churches: the reformer John Huss. At his execution, he sang.

John had translated Latin hymns into Bohemian and had written hymns of his own. Contrary to Roman Catholic law and practice, John had urged his followers to sing. And his brotherhood loved to sing. When the survivors of the movement (eventually known as Bohemian Brethren) fled into Moravia and Saxony, they translated their hymns into German. In 1501, they published their own hymnal with eighty hymns. Four years later, they published another edition with four hundred hymns. These are the first non-Catholic hymnals we know of.

The Moravian Brethren, who link back to the Bohemian Brethren, visited the energetic reformer, Martin Luther,

who wanted to restore congregational singing. Luther borrowed some hymns from them for his hymnal. Luther also wrote songs himself ("A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" is an example) and was so effective with music that one of his enemies wrote, "Luther's songs have damned more souls than all his books and speeches."

Other reformers were more reserved in their approach to church music. John Calvin rejected choirs and musical instruments (at least at first) and allowed his congregations to sing only versifications of the psalms in unison. Reforms in England also swept Catholic hymns out of churches and allowed only the singing

Light From the Dark Ages

Venantius Fortunatus, a bishop in Poitiers, France, wrote a Latin poem of 110 lines about Easter. "Welcome, Happy Morning" (*Church Hymnal*, 132) is a translation of part of his poem. Theodulph of Orleans wrote "All Glory, Laud and Honor" (*Church Hymnal*, 133) while imprisoned in an Italian monastery around A.D. 820. From the last in a series of seven Latin poems addressing seven members of Christ's crucified body comes the hymn "O Sacred Head, Now Wounded" (*Church Hymnal*, 121). It was translated from Latin to German to English. Bernard of Clairvaux, the founder of a French monastery, wrote a Latin poem of 192 lines, titled "Joyful Rhythm About the Name of Jesus." From that long poem come both "Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee" (*Church Hymnal*, 78) and "Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts" (*Church Hymnal*, 86). An even longer Latin poem of 3,000 lines by another monk inspired the writing of "Jerusalem the Golden" (*Church Hymnal*, 643).

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of psalms. Both Ulrich Zwingli and Conrad Grebel went even farther by opposing all music in public worship. No doubt the Catholic practice of singing a dead language to complex music kept them from seeing the value of singing in Christian worship. Grebel was also concerned about the snares of singing self-consciously. He said,

He who sings poorly is vexed and he who sings well is [likely to become] conceited; therefore, . . . if anyone wishes to sing he should sing and give thanks in his heart. (*The Christian Hymnary*, p. vi)

Have You Sung a Martyr Hymn Recently?

Singing martyr hymns can teach us of their unflinching spirit and loyalty to truth. But unless you have Amish roots and know German, most likely you do not sing many hymns written by Anabaptist martyrs. A sampling, however, have been translated. In *The Christian Hymnary* you will find a number of martyr hymns beginning with number 408. The *Anabaptist Hymnal*, published by Clarence Fretz in 1987, contains a broader selection. Incidentally, "Faith of Our Fathers," which we often associate with our martyr forefathers, was written by a Roman Catholic about persecution by the Protestants.

Although Conrad Grebel was an Anabaptist leader, the Anabaptist movement did not take a position against congregational singing. In fact, the first Anabaptist martyr, Felix Manz, revealed his attitude toward singing when he wrote the hymn "I Will Delight in Singing" (*Christian Hymnary*, 416). The Anabaptist emphasis on returning to New Testament teaching and example led them to sing in worship. In fact,

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a flood of religious songs poured over the young brotherhood like a vivifying and refreshing stream. The songs became the strongest attractive force for the brotherhood. They sang themselves into the hearts of many. (*The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, "Church Music", p. 791)

Many Anabaptists wrote their hymns while hiding or sitting in prisons. Sometimes they borrowed common folk tunes for their music. Their hymns do not boast high literary quality, but express deep personal faith and conviction.

By the 1560s, Anabaptists had compiled five hymnals. One was a collection of fifty-three German hymns called the *Ausbund*. A group of Swiss Brethren wrote many of those hymns while imprisoned in a castle at Passau, Bavaria. Songs from Dutch Mennonites, Hutterites, and Bohemian Brethren also found their way into the book. Today, Amish in America still sing from the *Ausbund*, using an embellished, drawn-out form of the original tunes.*

The Reformation sparked a rejection of singing in an unknown language and introduced a return to psalm singing. More importantly for our church music, the Reformation revived congregational singing. And the martyrs who sang with their last breaths show us the grace that true Christian singing imparts.

ENGLAND (1700–1900): CONTRIBUTING TO OUR CHURCH MUSIC

For congregational singing to thrive, we need good songs. With few exceptions, the English songs we sing were either

* For further insight on what the Anabaptists believed about singing, see Appendix C.

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written or translated since 1691, when seventeen-year-old Isaac Watts wrote:

Behold the glories of the Lamb,
Amidst the Father's throne;
Prepare new honors for His name,
And songs before unknown.

This verse by young Watts marked the beginning of a new era in English church music, in which thousands of songs

Hymns of Heretics?

Should we sing hymns written by those who hold views we consider heretical? Or those with whom we could not enjoy Christian fellowship? Should Anabaptists sing hymns written by ascetic Catholic monks? What about hymns written by the staunch Calvinist, Isaac Watts?

We must discern the doctrinal and practical implications of the hymns we use. Without apology, we must reject all false teaching as well as hymns that threaten our faith in other ways. However, those with whom we have no Christian fellowship because of doctrinal or other differences have written many hymns that express our beliefs and sentiments. They have blessed us.

before unknown were written. Before this time most English churches sang only versifications of the psalms, many of them quite crude. Isaac Watts's complaints about such singing incited his father to challenge him: "Give us something better, young man." He did, and his work inspired others to compose as well.

Watts believed that the songs of the church should express the Gospel. Though he was well educated, he proposed to "write down to the Level of Vulgar

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Capacities and to furnish Hymns for the meanest of Christians.” In other words, he wanted to write hymns that uneducated folk could understand. His hymns, though simple, have rich, meaningful expression (“See, from His head, His hands, His feet / Sorrow and love flow mingled down”). His hymns ring with the sound of Scripture (“Let elders worship at His feet, / The church adore around”). Many of his 761 hymns focus on God and His mighty works.

Approximately one hundred years after Watts, the Wesley brothers began contributing to English hymnody. January, 1736, found thirty-three-year-old John Wesley and his younger brother Charles sailing from England to America, where John was going to be chaplain. On the same ship traveled twenty-six Moravian missionaries who gathered daily to pray and sing German songs. One day while they were singing, a storm hit their ship, breaking the mainsail and dumping water into the vessel. In spite of the terror and screams about them, the Moravians continued to sing. Later John asked one of them, “Were you not afraid?” The Moravian answered, “Thank God, no.” The spiritual strength they found in their songs impressed John. After arriving in America, he learned German and translated Moravian songs into English. In a hymnal he published in 1737, he included “Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me,” one of the songs the Moravians had sung on their voyage to America.

In 1738, back in England, both John and Charles found a personal relationship with Christ in the meetings of the Moravian Brethren. The day after his conversion, Charles

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wrote his first hymn, and he continued writing until his hymns numbered over six thousand. In comparison to Watts, the Wesleys focused more on the believer's experience and relationship with the Lord.

The Wesleys were forbidden to preach their newfound faith from the pulpits in the Church of England and suffered mocking and mobbing from church loyalists. They traveled many miles, preaching to common people and sharing their hymns. Charles often composed on horseback while he and his brother traveled to their next preaching location.

The two brothers formed a productive team. Charles composed, and John edited and published his hymns. John was not an expert musician, but he sought reverent, simple tunes to fit Charles's hymns. He appreciated the tunes of the Moravians and used many of them in his first book of tunes.

It is said of John that "under his directing genius, Methodist hymnody became the most powerful evangelizing influence England ever knew" (Albert Edward Bailey, *The Gospel in Hymns*, p. 81). In fifty-three years, he published fifty-six books, some large, some small. God used the hymns that sprang from the spiritual fire in the hearts of the Wesley brothers to fan the flames of revival across England.

In the 1700s, John Newton, who left slave trading and became a preacher, could not find enough hymns to his liking, so he wrote some of his own. Two noteworthy examples are "Amazing Grace" and "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken." Newton also inspired his neighbor, William Cowper, to start writing hymns. Together they published *Olney Hymns*, which contained 67 selections from Cowper and 281 from Newton.

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In the first part of the 1800s, Reginald Heber wrote “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains” and “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty,” and Thomas Kelly wrote “Look, Ye Saints, the Sight Is Glorious” and “The Head That Once Was Crowned With Thorns.” In the same time period, James Montgomery, a Scottish Moravian, contributed to our church music “Angels From the Realms of Glory,” “In the Hour of Trial,” “Prayer Is the Soul’s Sincere Desire,” “Go to Dark Gethsemane,” and many other hymns. Obviously, the flood of good church music that began in the 1700s continued to flow in the following century.

In the mid 1800s, the Oxford Movement attempted to revitalize the Anglican Church by recovering ideals and practices from earlier centuries. This sparked an interest in translating into English early Greek and Latin hymns and German hymns from the Reformation era. Most of the Greek and Latin hymns that we sing were translated by this movement. In 1860, the Oxford movement culminated their contribution to church music by publishing *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. Over 100 million copies sold.

In the early 1900s, British hymns began addressing social and political issues. This new emphasis can be seen in “Let There Be Light, Lord God of Hosts” (*Church Hymnal*, 304), which was written in 1908. But by and large, hymns that address such issues are not useful to Christians believing in radical separation of church and state. So for churches continuing in the Anabaptist tradition, 1900 marks the end of England’s fruitful hymn-producing era—a period that produced thousands of meaningful, beautiful Christian hymns.

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AMERICA (1800–1900): CONTRIBUTING TO OUR CHURCH MUSIC

Early Christian immigrants to America brought their church music with them from Europe. The Pilgrims who sailed to America in the 1600s sang from British Psalters. The Puritans who arrived a decade later also sang psalms. In 1640 they published the first substantial English book in America—*The Whole Book of Psalms Faithfully Translated into English Meter*. Other immigrants—Dutch and Swedish Lutherans, German-speaking Moravians, Schwenkfelders, Mennonites, and Dunkards—brought hymns in their native tongues.

In the early 1800s, some folk hymnody or spiritual songs were written in America. But little has endured in our church music. However, “Brethren, We Have Met to Worship” (*Christian Hymnal*, 33), does come from the camp-meeting movement of this period.

The development of Sunday schools in America in the 1800s introduced what later were called Gospel songs. In comparison to the British hymn tradition, Gospel songs appeal more to the emotions and less to the mind. They dwell more on happy themes and less on the serious. They focus more on the experience of the creature and less on the glories of the Creator. The message tends to be more elementary, and the central thought of the song is commonly emphasized by a refrain. The music of Gospel songs is typically faster and has simpler harmonies.

Dwight L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey popularized Gospel songs in their mass revivals. They and the other evangelists of

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this period needed songs that appealed instantly to everyone and could be learned quickly. Gospel songs were a custom fit. But to people who loved singing the older, slower hymns,

these hymns were different: to some they sounded worldly, even sacrilegious. (Fredrick Hall, *Know Your Hymns Quizbook*, p. 27)

To a point, Gospel songs complemented the heavier hymns of Watts and similar writers. Most of our hymnals offer a selection of hymns and better Gospel songs. Many churches have found Gospel songs to be especially useful in evangelistic meetings and similar endeavors. But they must be used with discernment. Homer Rodeheaver, one of the first publishers to include Gospel songs in a songbook, clarified that they were

never intended for a Sunday morning service, nor for a devotional meeting. [Their] purpose was to bridge the gap between the popular song of the day and the great hymns and gospel songs, and to give men a simple, easy lilting melody which they could learn the first time they heard it, and which they could whistle and sing wherever they might be. (*Twenty Years With Billy Sunday*, as quoted in Reynolds, William J. et al, *A Survey of Christian Hymnody*, p. 131)

Blind Fanny Crosby wrote over eight thousand texts for Gospel songs. Many of them, like “Safe in the Arms of Jesus” and “Blessed Assurance,” are reverent and meaningful. Philip Bliss also wrote lyrics and music for Gospel songs that have contributed to our church music.

Lowell Mason (1792–1872) had a burden for good congregational singing and had the ability to help meet the need. Over the years, many composers of church music had

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produced arrangements too complex for ordinary congregations to sing well. Mason simplified such, suiting them to congregational singing. He also wrote original compositions. His music is dignified and promotes meaningful singing. You benefit from his music when singing “I’ll Praise My Maker,” “Hark! Ten Thousand Harps and Voices,” and “Joy to the World.” Mason wrote over a thousand tunes and adapted five hundred others. He also instructed other composers, including William Bradbury, who wrote the music used around the world with “Jesus Loves Me.” Either directly or indi-

rectly through those he instructed, Mason has influenced much of our four-part church music.

Mason knew that good music in itself was not enough. He (and many others) promoted singing schools that taught congregations the rudiments and the ability to read notes.

As the 1800s were ending, so was America’s contribution to our church music. America was changing. American churches were changing. American church music

Shaped Notes: Made in the USA

Though elementary note shapes were brought to America by English colonists in the 1600s, the continued development and use of shaped notes is basically an American phenomenon. The seven shapes used today were established in 1846 and are known as Aikin’s shapes. American publications for singing schools used shape notes extensively.

Shapes help people without extensive music training learn to read music. Where used, shaped notes continue to make it easier for all to participate in congregational singing.

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was changing. It was reflecting to an increasing degree the tastes of ungodly American culture.

The music of the gospel song in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, while shaped in some ways by the earlier camp meeting songs, also had reflected the influence of popular music of the day. (Reynolds, *Survey*, p. 131)

As might have been expected, time has shown most of these later [Gospel songs] to be flippant, trivial, reeking with sentimentality. (Hall, *Know Your Hymns Quizbook*, p. 27)

As we consider America's contribution to church music, let's remember that the true Gospel not only stirs our feelings, but it also feeds our soul.

RECENT TIMES (1900–2000): NEGLECTING CONGREGATIONAL SINGING

In the last one hundred years, many churches have changed their view of worship. Awe-inspiring reverence for God is out of style. So are heart-gripping expositions of the Scriptures. Much worship now caters to the individual. What will make him comfortable? What will he enjoy? What will make him able to participate? What will bring him back next Sunday? Many churches use the answers to these questions to determine their worship style.

A man from India said of the church services he observed in America:

The orchestras, choirs, "special" music—and sometimes even the preaching—seemed to me more like entertainment than worship. (K.P. Yohannan, *Revolution in World Missions*, p. 46)

What About Using Choruses in Worship Services?

We are discussing neither the chorus that is a part of some songs in our hymnals nor the practice of children singing choruses. Rather, we are looking at the very simple, repetitious choruses that many churches use in their worship services. The story is told of an old farmer who went to a large city church one Sunday. When he arrived home, his wife asked him about the services.

"Well," the farmer drawled, "the service was good, but different. They sang praise choruses instead of hymns."

"What's the difference?" his wife asked.

"Well, it's like this. If I were to tell you, 'Martha, the cows are in the corn,' that would be a hymn. On the other hand if I were to tell you, 'Martha, MARTHA, Martha, oh Martha, oh dear Martha, Martha, Martha, the cows, the big cows, the brown cows, the black cows, the white cows, the black and white cows, the COWS, COWS, COWS, are in the corn, are in the corn, are in the corn, corn, corn,' that would be a praise chorus."

The old farmer must have heard something of this nature:

"Send me, Jesus, send me, Jesus, send me,
Jesus, send me, Lord.

Lead me, Jesus, lead me, Jesus, lead me, Je-
sus, lead me, Lord.

Fill me, Jesus, fill me, Jesus, fill me, Jesus, fill
me, Lord."

Many churches today have replaced their old-time hymns with choruses of this caliber. Some of what they sing are Scripture portions. And truly, the Scripture is worthy of being sung. But it seems this modern trend is not so much a

revival of the early church practice of singing Scripture as it is a departure from singing that is reverential and spiritual.

For the most part, Pentecostals introduced the current wave of chorus singing into Protestant churches. One of their musicians observed,

“Exclusive use of choruses tends to produce a people who have the same depth of spirituality as the music they sing. The result is a faith which lacks depth, is simplistic, pleasure-oriented, emotionalistic, intellectually weak, undisciplined, and prone to changeability of feelings. The end result of nothing but chorus singing is immaturity” (Calvin Johansson, as quoted in Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old and New*, p. 201).

J. Mark Stauffer shares a similar perspective in his book, *Mennonite Church Music*. He writes,

“Choruses are generally of a simple nature. This is one reason why they can be used with children as successfully as they are. The child’s mind is elementary; his conception of religious truth is limited; his songs must be objective; and for these reasons, these choruses are especially suited to him. Then many of the choruses that we sing may be questionable because the deeper, more mature and lasting elements of worship are absent. The melody and rhythm of some Gospel choruses are entirely too spectacular and exaggerated to contribute to the spirit of worship that we desire in our religious services. On the other hand, if some of our better choruses have been used in the conversion of some soul, surely no complaint can be raised. But as a general rule, since Gospel choruses are more suited to children, suppose we let the children sing them.” (Stauffer, *Mennonite Church Music*, p. 2)

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Today people enter church doors hungering more for what will make them feel good than what will make them be good. A. W. Tozer thought the appetite began changing back in the mid 1800s. He wrote:

Lay this [1849] hymnal beside any of the productions of the last [100] years and compare them. The differences will be found pronounced, and to the devout soul more than a little depressing. . . . With the coming of the great religious campaigns . . . and their mass appeal, religious singing started on a long trip down. . . . Experience took [the] place of theology in popular singing. . . . Ballad tunes displaced the graver and more serious type of melody. The whole spiritual mood declined and the songs expressed the mood faithfully. (*Still Waters*, p. vi)

The congregational singing style that was born in the Reformation and was further developed in England and America has but one purpose: congregational worship. It blends the voices of men and women to make a group expression. Churches that are sold out to individualism find this kind of music stifling. So what have they done? In 1944, Paul Erb wrote,

Christian churches in general have handed over, so far as any real effective singing is concerned, the entire musical service to the choir and the soloists. (as quoted in J. Mark Stauffer, *Mennonite Church Music*, p. v)

The criticism of Western culture by society's liberal thinkers has affected American attitudes toward church music. High society has determined that all cultures have an equally valid musical expression. Only bigots, they say, would hold that four-part church singing is better than drumbeats in African jungles. Although many Christian churches did not

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go that far, they have developed distaste for four-part church singing and an appetite for anything different. How has this affected what people in the pews are singing?

When the hymn reformers introduced music from other cultures into their canon, a handful of them noticed that the characteristics of praise and worship music that they most disliked are abundantly present in Christian folk songs from Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Many of these international songs have simple music, driving beat, repetitious lyrics, light theology, and an emphasis on experience. (Michael S. Hamilton, as quoted in *Christianity Today*, July 12, 1999, p. 35)

In this period many church hymnals gathered dust in church basements while the congregations rapidly lost the ability to sing together in harmony. We do not yet know the end of the current trends in church music. But this we know: much worship music has been lost and something inferior is taking its place.

OUR GENERATION (2000–): INVITING JESUS TO SING WITH US

We have a rich musical heritage. We have access to more good songs than we can possibly use. One estimate says there are four hundred thousand Christian songs in English. Which should we be singing in our churches?

When David said, “In the midst of the *church* will I sing praise unto thee,” he referred in a prophetic sense to Christ. His prophecy shows Jesus singing praises to God, surrounded by a congregation of Christian worshipers. Let’s have this

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fulfilled in our congregations. We need to choose songs for our collective worship that Jesus would want to sing with us.

So much is mine! His gifts to me are boundless,
And they are mine because He made me His!
How can I ever give Him due devotion?
I stand in awe! A legacy like this!

—Margaret Penner Toews,
from “A Goodly Heritage”
(*Zion’s Praises*, 362)

Choices in Song

THE WORD OF GOD directs us,

Be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord. (Ephesians 5:18, 19)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Colossians 3:16)

SHALL WE SING?

Preaching and teaching seem to be the backbone of worship. Yet something remains that God wants singing to do. That's why He tells us to sing.

Two dangerous outlooks on music threaten us. Both defeat God's purpose in singing. One view lifts music from a means to an end. It promotes music for its intellectual, emotional, or entertainment value. The other view disdains the role of music in worship, which keeps it from reaching God's ends.

Some churches are stuck in the first ditch. For them, music is not a vehicle to carry the lyrics to the heart or the praise of God to the skies, but a vehicle to give joyrides. Other churches, typically the more conservative ones, see this error.

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In some cases, to avoid that ditch, they have slid into the opposite ditch. They perceive good music as a spiritual liability rather than a spiritual blessing.

According to the Bible, music is not weight, but wheels, to a song's spiritual message. God asks us to sing because harmonious singing is a valid and necessary means of communicating spiritual truth. Nothing can replace it.

Yes, let's sing. But what?

PSALMS, HYMNS, AND SPIRITUAL SONGS

The Bible teaches us to use music to *express godly sentiments, edify the church, and exalt God*. (See Chapter 3.) What can we sing to accomplish this? Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 both answer: “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” It seems these three distinct terms refer to three kinds of song. What did the words mean in Greek?

Psalms (in Greek: *psalmos*) a set piece of music, i.e. a sacred ode (accompanied with the voice, harp or other instrument; a Psalm); collectively, the book of Psalms.*

Hymns (in Greek: *hymnos*) means “a religious song that celebrates God,” precisely what *hymn* means in modern English.

Spiritual songs is translated from *pneumatikos oide*. *Pneumatikos* means “spiritual,” as opposed to human. *Oide* refers generically to an ode or song. *Spiritual songs* is a very literal translation.

The Book of Psalms is the hymnal of the Old Testament. It was “given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that

* For further discussion on the word Psalms as used in the New Testament, please refer to Appendix D.

the man of God may be perfect” (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). The psalms are the very Word of God and need no doctrinal review.

The New Testament directs us to continue singing the psalms. They will be profitable to the church until the end of time. But by themselves they are incomplete. Their references to Christ are prophetic and veiled. Their references to worship and vengeance, in many instances, are definitely Old Testament. So we must complement the psalms with hymns and spiritual songs—music from the New Testament era.

Christians of all nationalities should write and sing both hymns and spiritual songs in their native tongues. No crisp line divides hymns

How Can We Sing Psalms?

The psalms lack the rhyme and meter we are used to in our songs. They are like that in Hebrew too; their rhyme and rhythm are in thought, not sound.

There are two ways to sing psalms word for word: chants and choruses. Chants do not have meter or a regular beat pattern, and allow the verses to contain a varying number of syllables. The music is paced to the flow of the lyrics. You will find four psalms set to chant music in the *Church Hymnal* (649–652) and thirteen in the back of the small hymnal *Still Waters*. (Appendix B contains several helps for singing chants.)

Singing a psalm as a chorus requires a melody that provides for the irregular number of syllables the psalm contains. By yourself, you can sing psalms quite easily this way; simply make a melody as you sing.

Many psalms have been versified (given rhyme and meter), which means we can sing them like any other metered song. “Ye Nations Round the Earth” is an excellent versification of Psalm 100.

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from spiritual songs. In fact, we often use the terms *hymn* and *song* interchangeably. In their narrow meanings, however, there is a difference. The definitions of *hymnos* and *pneumatikos oide* help us understand it.

Hymns focus on God. Spiritual songs include all others that have definite spiritual merit. They too must point us Godward and lift our thoughts heavenward. But their focus on God is not as direct as that of hymns.

Many hymns, like “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing” and “O Everlasting Light,” address God di-

rectly. Such hymns are prayers and usually include both petitions and praise. Other hymns, for example “There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy” and “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” speak directly about God. Hymns are generally more solemn than spiritual songs and generally have more depth of thought and expression. They are the voice of the soul before God.

Spiritual songs often focus on the Christian’s

Is “Spiritual Song” the same as “Gospel Song”?

Technically they do not mean the same thing. The term *Gospel songs* (or *hymns*) refers to songs produced in America beginning with the Sunday school movement and mass revivals of the 1800s. Very few Gospel songs fall into the hymn category. Neither, however, are they all spiritual songs. To be considered a spiritual song, a Gospel song must make a definite and positive spiritual impact.

Time gives a clearer picture of the spiritual value of religious movements and their music. For more than thirty years, Ira D. Sankey was the song leader in D. L.

walk and relationship with God. “The Solid Rock” is the personal testimony of a Christian—a spiritual song. “Lo, What a Pleasing Sight” speaks of Christian unity—again, a spiritual song. “Ye Are the Light of the World” admonishes Christians to witness for Christ—yet another spiritual song.

HOW THEN SHOULD WE CHOOSE OUR SONGS?

We face this question from our personal musical perspective. We have tastes and preferences. Certain hymnals we appreciate, others we accept, and perhaps some we find repulsive. We have feelings—both for and against—particular songs. Although

Moody’s revivals. He played an essential role in popularizing the “Gospel song” in America. The year he died, *The Nation* magazine stated,

“We are told of the huge crowds, sometimes 20,000 people, who came to the Moody and Sankey revival meetings, and of the enormous sales of the *Gospel Hymns*. The number of copies printed is reported to be 50,000,000.”

Such revival services we are not likely to see again . . . and this method of appeal is now gravely distrusted even in denominations which once relied on it. Mr. Moody himself in his later years is said to have doubted whether the effect of revivals was permanent. He found that, after the excitement had died out, the tears and groans from ‘conviction of sin’ and the ecstasies of conversion left many men about where they were before, only a little more indifferent and callous. A community ‘burnt over’ by a wild revival often proved a difficult field to cultivate by sober and steady means. (*The Nation*, as quoted in *The Songs We Sing*, pp. 21–22)

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we want to be objective when evaluating songs—let’s face the fact—we all have our biases.*

Our perspective is not necessarily wrong; neither is it necessarily right. But it keeps us from being completely objective when evaluating songs or considering someone else’s evaluation. Shouldn’t this keep us humble as we sort through what’s available in Christian music?

We cannot base our choices in music on what is commonly accepted, on its immediate effects, or on our likes and dislikes. Divorce and remarriage is common, appears at times to work better than the first union, and is defended by those who like their second marriage better than their first. But it is still wrong. We must also allow God and His Word to guide our musical perspective and our choice of songs.

The songs we choose to sing must be Scriptural. They must, of course, be doctrinally sound, for singing false doctrine teaches false doctrine. We should go beyond the teaching, however, and consider the emphasis and atmosphere of the song. How do they correspond with Scripture? The hymn must be true to Scripture. It is not enough that its thought is inviolate of Scripture truth; the very form in which the thought is cast must be just as true to the Scripture as the thought itself. Otherwise we cannot be safeguarded in the offering of divine praise.

The abstract truth of Scripture is one thing; the spirit of Scripture—its tone and temper—is quite another. But both must be present in a correct transcription of scriptural thought. The naked truth may be preserved while its spirit

* Typically, we gain our musical perspective in our youth. Mature adults usually reject new trends in music, while young people can easily accept them. This is true in both the church and the world.

is violated; and on the other hand, its spirit may be presented while the statement of the truth is inaccurate. We cannot certainly save ourselves from both errors except by insisting on fidelity in both sentiment and expression. (*University Musical Encyclopedia*, pp. 64–65)

The songs we choose to sing must be devotional. Our songs show the kind of reverence and fear we have for God. A clear vision of Him—like the one Isaiah received (Isaiah 6)—will move us to choose songs that are devotional. True devotion contemplates God in the various relationships that He sustains toward His earthly creatures. The true hymn must therefore have a motion Godward. It is not exactly necessary that God be directly addressed—indeed, the express form of address may be otherwise—but God must be uppermost in the thought even if not particularly conspicuous in the expression. The true hymn must tend toward God, bring Him to mind, exalt His Name, and seek His glory.

Devotion is also worshipful. A hymn must contain nothing inconsistent with this, nothing that may not properly be uttered in approaching the infinite, adorable God. Those which are coarse, irreverent, trifling, or calculated to form an unworthy image in the mind should be severely excluded from our worship. (*University Musical Encyclopedia*, p. 66)

The human element in devotional songs is found in the lowly posture of worship. They harmonize with what the hymn writer John Newton, said at eighty-two: “My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things, that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour.”

Devotional songs are the voice of a soul living with God. They attempt no frivolity and soar far beyond sentimentality about life’s experiences.

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What About Folksongs?

Folksongs are usually composed by common people about their experiences or observations. Common people sing them in everyday life. Should Christians sing them?

Most folksongs have elements objectionable to Christians. They might express a fondness for rum or recount a foolish romance. Few pass the test of Philippians 4:8.

There are some folk-type songs, however, that dwell on wholesome nature themes. For example,

"See the flakes of fleecy snow
Falling on the whitened earth
below;
Falling, falling, falling slow,
Falling on the whitened earth
below."

While such folk songs are fitting at home, we have an ample supply of songs that are better suited for public worship.

The songs we choose to sing should pull us the right way. All songs pull a certain direction. Scriptural songs pull toward God's Word. Devotional songs pull toward God. This is the direction Christians want to go. The world's songs, meanwhile, pull us toward her. They make us love her. We must choose our destination and then sing the songs that take us there. (In Chapter 7 we will look more at worldly pressure in music.)

We should choose music within the range of our ability. Some congregations have more skill than others. A large congregation can sing

some songs that never will go well in a smaller one. A steady diet of songs that a congregation cannot handle dampens the blessing of singing together.

There is room for variety and personal taste in choosing songs. Within the bounds of the points we have noted, there is room

for personal preferences. Most regular services benefit from a mix of invigorating and solemn selections. Special occasions demand particular kinds of songs.

HOW SHALL WE SING?

Our singing should express the melody in our heart.

Only the heart can sing what rings true before God,
Your mouth is but the interpreter.

(Songs of the Ausbund, p. 21)

Melodious hearts make congregational singing portray the Spirit of Christ and draw sinners through church doors into the pews. Such singing invites all to join in.

We should sing heartily. “Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Colossians 3:23). What God asks us to do merits the effort it takes to do it well. For most people, learning to sing well takes some effort, including some instruction. We sing to the Lord. He deserves our best.

When singing together, we should blend our voice with others. We should blend in volume, tempo, and tone. We should try neither to get others to hear us nor to prevent others from hearing us. We should start and stop with the leader and move in time through the song. Our voice should harmonize with others.

We should open our hearts to the singing. We lose the spiritual blessing of singing together when we harbor a critical attitude toward how our congregation sings. Being critical of myself keeps me from singing out and enjoying the blessing of the song. Criticizing the leader or other singers also isolates

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me from spiritual blessings. Our singing is not a performance but an experience of spiritual enrichment.

AND WHAT ABOUT JUST LISTENING?

“Teaching and admonishing” implies that we both sing and listen to music. That said, however, the emphasis in Ephesians 5:18, 19 and Colossians 3:16 clearly lies on singing. God wants us to go beyond listening, to the deeper involvement of singing. For us to retrieve all the benefits God has given music, we must sing. The highest quality of listening usually occurs when we ourselves sing.

When singing collectively, we should also be listening—drinking in the music and the message. Singing without listening leaves us untaught and un-admonished. It used to be that having music played was a luxury, a pleasure of kings and rich people. Now music is cheap. You can likely afford to have a music player in your living room, bedroom, shop, and car. Many people listen to music most of their waking hours. Such easy access to music can easily change us from participators to bystanders, from singers to hearers only.

The listening aspect of teaching and admonishing provides spiritual nutrition. But we can only receive spiritual food for so long when listening to recorded music. We tire of digesting. We get full. And we quit receiving the spiritual message. To continue listening may enhance our mood, but it dulls our spiritual appetite. It tarnishes the spiritual value of singing.

What are the effects of cheap music? of too much music? The same as the effects of too many cheap cheeseburgers:

obesity. We continue to eat but are not fed. Nutrition becomes poison. We grow fleshy flab, not spiritual muscle. We become spiritual couch potatoes.

How can you tell when you have listened too much? Asking yourself these questions may help you know: Am I receiving the spiritual message of the song? Is the singing stimulating the musings (thinking) of my mind? Or is it amusing me (causing me not to think)?

We hinder ourselves spiritually when we play music to lift emotions brought low through immature responses, self-centeredness, or sin. We do to ourselves what a mother does to her hungry baby when she pops a pacifier into his mouth—she makes him feel better without meeting his need. When we use Christian music as an emotional pacifier, we hinder our spiritual growth. And it seems we also degrade Christian music itself when we play it just to enhance our moods. Low emotions should make us lean on God. He is our Rock. He brings us stability.

King Saul had a spiritual need and it troubled him. And, yes, listening to music made him feel better. But it was cover, not cure, and when the music ended, his spirit was troubled once more. Is the singing you listen to meeting your spiritual needs, or is it glossing them with an emotional lift?

In Canada, a twenty-three-year-old man lay dying in a hospital. At two o'clock in the morning a nurse called his mother to come. She rushed to the hospital and found her son still conscious. "Dying is a new and strange experience," he said. "I'm afraid. I want you to pray and sing for me."

So she prayed, and then sang,

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Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high:
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide,
O receive my soul at last.

The young man's face grew lighter while she sang. He said, "I feel better; that's the kind of songs that help."

Surely the songs that help us when we are dying are the kind which will help us as we live each day.

I have a song I love to sing,
Since I have been redeemed,
Of my Redeemer, Saviour, King,
Since I have been redeemed.

—Edwin Excell,
from "I Have a Song I Love to Sing"
(*Christian Hymnary*, 841)

The World's Music

TODAY, POPULAR MUSIC¹ pulses from vehicles on the street. It fills stores and workplaces. Though the Christian is not of the world, he is in the world, and he hears popular music.

Does the Bible's command "Be not conformed to this world" include the world's music? Yes, it does. And as we look at the roots, nature, and effects of the world's music, you will see why the Christian must resist it.

AMERICA'S POPULAR MUSIC BEGINS

In colonial America, popular music scarcely existed. The pioneers were busy clearing away trees and building cabins, and they lacked both time and money to spend on music. They also had no efficient means to broadcast music: no television, no radio, and no records, cassettes, or CD's. Besides,

moral and religious scruples, some manifested as laws, prohibited "entertainment" music, particularly music for the stage. (David Willoughby, *The World of Music*, p. 103)

Eventually colonial Americans had time and money for music. Many learned to read music and to play the piano. They bought sheet music—mostly songs imported from Europe.

¹ In this chapter we use the term *popular music* broadly to refer to all forms of music that enjoy popularity in our culture.

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Songs gained popularity as family and friends gathered to hear them sung in neighbors' homes or at community centers.

These songs were printed on broad sheets and sold in the streets. They were so popular that

the New England preacher, Cotton Mather [1663–1728], thundered warnings against “foolish songs and ballads which hawkers and peddlers carry to all parts of the country.” (Lillian Erlich, *What Jazz Is All About*, p. 9)

In the nineteenth century, America began producing her own music. The first American music to become popular was the minstrel. America offered it to the world, and “it took over the world,” as one commentator put it. Minstrel songs were lively, syncopated, and comical, portraying black Americans as illiterate and ridiculous. At first, white Americans smeared their faces with burnt cork and performed for white audiences. Later, blacks sang minstrel songs too.

As the twentieth century began, publishers lining a street in New York City, nicknamed “Tin Pan Alley,” produced most of America’s music.

From Tin Pan Alley have come our pop tunes and standards, our most beloved songs—songs for amusement, entertainment, and escape. They include sentimental love songs, syncopated songs and dance tunes, Latin American music, nonsense songs, and show tunes. (Willoughby, *Music*, p. 120)

Then in 1920, commercial radio was born. With the help of the radio and the record player, a song or a performer could gain instant popularity across the entire nation. The grip of “Tin Pan Alley” music on the American public tightened.

ROOTS OF TODAY'S POPULAR MUSIC

Music produced in the “Tin Pan Alley” tradition was still popular in the early twentieth century.² In the 1950s, however, rock music invaded America and robbed Tin Pan Alley of its monopoly on popular music. Where did this invader come from?

The fourteen blacks who arrived in Virginia in 1619 were the start of a Trans-Atlantic slave traffic that flowed for two hundred years. Slave traders tore men and women from their tribal culture in West Africa and herded them onto stinking ships. In America the blacks became the property of their masters. These slaves lived in a culture of their own for two and a half centuries. They had their own music—music with African roots.

In West Africa, rhythm was by far the most predominant element of music. The tireless beat evoked a single, overpowering mood. It steeled warriors in battle and hypnotized those participating in pagan ceremonies.

Singers and dancers in religious rites seemed transported to another world. Sometimes they became “possessed.” They lost contact with their surroundings and flung themselves about or fell to the ground. (Erllich, *Jazz*, p. 5)

In West African music, as many as six (some say fifty) drummers would perform together, each with his own beat. Their drumming was the voices of gods, they thought. They also employed their beat music in voodoo, a ritualistic, Satanic witchcraft used to cast spells and that involved, at times, animal and even human sacrifice.

² Some of it still lives on and is known as “standards” or “classics.”

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So

when Negro slaves heard the monotonous rhythm of Western music, their instinctive reaction was to add extra beats and shift the accents to make a livelier sound.

. . . They also changed the sound by attacking the notes in the African way—with slides and slurs and vibrato effects. (Erllich, *Jazz*, p. 8)



Eventually, with some structure borrowed from the whites and tonality and rhythms imported from West Africa, Afro-Americans developed the blues.

The blues scale is created by alterations to the major scale. Usually, the third or seventh scale tone is lowered slightly creating the “blue notes.” In addition, blues performers “bend” the tones (a slight lowering of the pitch followed by a return to the original), or they slide into or out of the pitches to enhance their moaning, mournful, “bluesy” quality. (Willoughby, *Music*, p. 46)

Blues told the ongoing “blue” story of the struggles blacks faced in America.

[Blues] poetry reflects most frequently the element of mistreatment, derived from the injustice and misery of an oppressed people or the loss of a lover or a loved one. (Willoughby, *Music*, p. 45)

Blues also

dramatize and celebrate the ups and downs of life, enabling singers and their audiences to externalize some of their strongest feelings, particularly those dealing with interpersonal relationships between the sexes. (David Evans, *Rock Music in America*, p. 10).

Blues is a rootstock of American popular music. Its influence is heard today in rhythm and blues (R&B), jazz, soul, and rock.

Because they believed in powerful good and evil spirits, some black slaves continued practicing voodoo in America. In their voodoo rites they used

powerful drum rhythms and tirelessly repeated chanting and dancing to bring about a trance state in which they are “possessed” by these spirits. Many of the Negroes of New Orleans came from tribes that practiced voodoo. New Orleans became the voodoo capital of the United States, and an empty lot known as Congo Square became the center for voodoo dances.

These dances flourished between 1817 and 1885, and had a strong influence on the formation of New Orleans jazz. They kept alive complicated African rhythms that had all but disappeared elsewhere in this country. (Erlach, *Jazz*, p. 79)

In New Orleans, as various races and cultures shared their traditional music, jazz was born. It is a music that frees performers to improvise as they sing.

It happened in New Orleans more than any other southern city because of its cosmopolitan environment and its comparatively liberal social attitudes. (Willoughby, *Music*, p. 78)

About popular music the question has been raised,

Apart from the primitive, driving rhythm that lifts the fur on your spine and starts your feet tapping in spite of yourself, what is the outstanding feature of any hot band? The answer—IMPROVISATION. (Charles Henderson et al, *How to Sing for Money*, p. 159)

Improvisation refers to singers improvising as they sing. Improvisers do not view music as a road to follow, but as a runway from which to fly. They are not so interested in singing the music as in expressing themselves. These

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doers-of-their-own-thing can communicate relativism, individualism, and even anarchy in their music.

By 1917, Storeyville, the New Orleans red-light district, gave employment to hundreds of young jazz musicians. But in that year the US Secretary of the Navy, 'alarmed by the regularity with which his sailors became involved in incidents of violence and dissipation,' ordered the bars and brothels closed down. An ironic act indeed; for it was this very event which led to the accelerated spread of jazz beyond the city, as the young black performers sought employment elsewhere. (David Tame, *The Secret Power of Music*, p. 192)

As this was happening among the blacks, another singing style developed among the rural, and typically poor, white folk in the South. With their southern twang, they sang the rural Southern sentiments about love, death, and religion. The American public regarded it as culturally and musically inferior and called it hillbilly. In the second quarter of the twentieth century, however, hillbilly was broadcast in America's large cities, and hillbilly records sold profusely.

Singers from the South along with many others headed west in search of greater opportunity, taking with them their religion and their songs. The gulf widened between hillbilly and its folk roots. Western hillbilly dealt with loneliness and infidelity rather than religion, sentiment, and nostalgia. (Willoughby, *Music*, p. 112)

Various performers helped pull hillbilly out of the southern hills to popularity as country and western. One was Jimmie Rodgers, who

was all about moving old-time music forward, integrating the blues and vaudeville into his own infectious, still

modern-sounding style of country. Rodgers was a born showman from the Mississippi flatlands, and his life hummed along like a classic, gut-wrenching country ballad: The onetime railroad brakeman roamed across the country for years, a hard-drinking, hard-living womanizer who caught tuberculosis and who, after a meteoric rise to fame, died in 1933 at the age of 36. (*U.S. News & World Report*, July 8 / July 15, 2002, p. 48)

In the 1950s, as previously mentioned, a new sound invaded America: rock. It carried the rhythm-and-blues beat to the white American populace. Many performers who helped introduce this new sound previously played country and western and infused that influence into this new sound as well.

Rock was an amalgamation of several styles and influences, but it was primarily a melding of rhythm and blues and country and western music—a merging of black and white traditions. (Willoughby, *Music*, p. 119)

But although it built on existing music, it was also a protest against the music of the past and of an older generation, and against the values of that generation. (Carl Belz, *The Story of Rock*, p. 31)

Rock belonged to young people and used hard-driving lyrics to express their feelings toward life. It expressed their resistance toward authority and tradition and gave them license to unleash their lusts and live in rebellion.

Since jazz and the blues were the parents of rock and roll, this also means that there exists a direct line of descent from the voodoo ceremonies of Africa, through jazz, to rock and roll and all of the other forms of rock music current today. (Tame, *Secret Power*, p. 190)

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New forms of music continue to become popular in America. But—barring a massive musical import from some other culture—the popular music of the future will continue to draw her lifeblood through the roots we have discussed here. The tones and beats around us were conceived in African voodoo ceremonies, begotten in American brothels, nurtured in bars and nightclubs, and then grew up to conquer the world.

THE NATURE OF POPULAR MUSIC

Performers wanting to produce popular music must cater to the appetites of man.

“Popular” means “of the people.” A “popular song” is, therefore, first one which is designed to please the mass of the people. (Henderson, *How to Sing*, p. 7)

Blacks in America, whose ancestors suffered at the hands of their masters, love the blues because it expresses their feelings about hardship and abuse. Country and western consoles the adulterer that others do the same. Teenagers defying authority find a kindred spirit in rock.

Popular music reflects, and even shapes, the mood and morals of society. To the tune of popular music, our society has slid from comedy to corruption. As jazz gained popularity in the 1920s, *The New York American* told how the fall of one thousand girls had been attributed to its influence. The magazine went on to say that

girls in small towns, as well as in the big cities, in poor homes and rich homes, are victims of the weird, insidious, neurotic music that accompanies modern dancing.

(*New York American*, June 22, 1922, as quoted in Tame, *Secret Power*, p. 194)

Likewise, the first rock bands stunned people of respectable morals. The news at first commonly called rock “smut.” Religious and social groups waged campaigns against the music that parents, politicians, and clergy saw as harmful, perhaps even a Communist plot to undermine teen morals. (*U.S. News & World Report*, July 8 / 15, 2002, p. 58)

A preacher in Florida burned thousands of dollars worth of rock records because he believed the music had led hundreds of young people to commit fornication. Jersey City, New Jersey, banned the Comets, an early rock group, saying,

Rock-and-roll music encouraged juvenile delinquency and inspired young females in lewd bathing suits to perform obscene dances on the city's beaches. (*U.S. News & World Report*, July 8 / 15, 2002, p. 58)

In the face of such efforts to govern morality, one musician boasted:

If you let us write the nation's music, we don't care who writes the laws. We will be in control. (Quoted by Clifford Nolt in “Evaluating Our Music Interests,” October 9, 1992)

The early rock star, Elvis Presley, shocked the nation with his lewd behavior on stage but

the more parents, moralists, clergymen and critics railed against him, the more teenagers flipped for him. Elvis was, for them, the supreme symbol of juvenile rebellion. (*The New Sound*, Yes, p. 62, as quoted in *Satan's Music Exposed*, p. 85)

Who has won the battle? Did rock retreat, or did society surrender?

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While heavy-metal and acid noises pound from Maine to California, the public now lifts little, if any, resistance. With its sensual beat and perverse lyrics, popular music has

conducted America's abandonment to immorality. Performers, not preachers, are setting moral standards for our society. Rock has twisted into rap, which glorifies gangsters as well as violence; and society, shrugging its collective shoulders, says of rap stars,

They're about as threatening as an ice cream cone. (Nelson George, as quoted in *U.S. News and World Report*, July 8 / July 15, 2002, p. 65)

Who remembers that America's grandfathers who sailed the *Mayflower* across the Atlantic refused to sing harmonies on Sunday? How far America has slid!

What About the Moral Benefits of Classical Music?

In most of its forms, classical music has no lyrics. When it became prevalent in Western culture,

"For the first time in the history of music, instrumental music became more important than vocal music." (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 15th ed., s.v. "Music, the History of Western")

Classical music is not evil like today's popular music. Typically, it honors musical structure and portrays a spirit of nobility and discipline. Therefore many people view classical music as morally constructive.

Consider, however, its effects on spiritual life.

Classical music makes a minimal appeal to the understanding and spirit. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13:1, likened righteous works that lack love to the sounds of musical instruments (a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal). Both are

But surely all popular music isn't as bad as rock and rap. True enough, some forms of popular music are not as bad as others. But is any of it positively good?

At best, worldly music can only stimulate the human intellect or lift the emotions. It may help a person feel good about himself or the world in general. But it will not draw a soul to God. Instead, worldly music wedges itself between souls and God, shoving them, at times, to the very brink of hell.

The nature of popular music reflects the nature of man—the *sinful* nature of man. No wonder our local paper used the following terms to describe the music to be performed in town this coming week: “raw,”

hollow. The primary appeal of classical music is intellectual and emotional. Morality roused by such means is as flimsy as morality propped by peer pressure. True morality is born through spiritual communion with God.

Classical music does not communicate the Gospel. It attempts to raise man to higher ground right from where he is. The modern classical composer, John Adams, said, “My roots go back to the New England transcendentalism of Emerson, Thoreau, and even Whitman: an optimistic, philosophical viewpoint.” (*U.S. News and World Report*, July 8 / July 15, 2002, p. 53) Classical music does not take man down through the humiliating valley of repentance and lift him on the far side through new birth, to lofty morals. That is the Gospel way up.

The following warning applies to the supposed moral benefits of classical music: “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

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“bitter,” “angry,” “violent mood swings,” and “songs of addiction and despair.”

EFFECTS OF POPULAR MUSIC

People listen to popular music because they like it. Unfortunately, however, most people remain oblivious (some willfully so) to all that their music does within them. What is popular music doing?

Popular music produces idolatry. To many fans, performers are gods. They love them with all—heart, soul, mind, and body. In devotion to them, they buy their clothes, set their hair, choose their words, pick their posture, spend their money, and lose their morals. In the year 2000, Americans spent \$14,323,000,000 (fifty dollars per citizen, including children) on recorded music and music videos.

Some popular music carries occult or demonic influences. Just the names of some music groups tie them to the occult: KISS (Kids in Satan’s Service), Black Sabbath (who titled one album, “We Sold Our Souls for Rock ‘N’ Roll”), and Styx, named for the river that supposedly flows from hell.

It is said of the Rolling Stones, a British rock group that achieved broad popularity,

They have emphasized permissiveness, the feeling that traditional society is rotten at its core, “take it or leave it” personal relations, a love for the satanic, and the desire of many that life should be as they want it to be and should be lived on their terms. (*The Rolling Stones*, pp. 90, 92)

Some popular music produces violence. After the rock singer Bill Haley toured in Europe, an East Berlin newspaper reported, Rock-and-roll gangster Haley produces an orgy of American uncivilization [turning] the youth of the land of Bach and Beethoven into raging beasts. (*U.S. News and World Report*, July 8 / 15, 2002, p. 59)

Nor can the performers themselves escape. Many die untimely, tragic deaths. One study of the deaths of 116 rock and country singers showed that 25 percent were suicides and murders. Over half died in their twenties.

From the highlands of Guatemala comes the story of a boy who played the marimba (an instrument similar to a xylophone) at a fiesta. For a day and a night he played. He continued the next day until in the evening he fell into a coma. He died the day after, a victim of music. In 1969, at a rock festival the Rolling Stones played the song "Sympathy for the Devil," and the Hell's Angels "bodyguards" went on a rampage so violent that some in the audience were killed. About the incident, the lead singer commented, "Something like that happens every time I play that song."

Most popular music loosens morals. With obscene (even pornographic) cases, its lyrics and

A Prophetic Voice

In 1832, Joseph Funk, the publisher of *A Compilation of Genuine Church Music* (*Harmonia Sacra*), wrote, "Wherever man inhabits the earth, the power of music is felt and acknowledged. This influence of sweet sounds, like most other gifts of our bountiful Creator, may be so used as to be the instrument of much good, or perverted to the purpose of deep and extensive evil."

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beat, an air of intimacy, and lewd conduct, popular music promotes immorality. One country performer said,

As a country artist, I'm not proud of a lot of things in my field. There is no doubt in my mind that we are contributing to the moral decline in America. (Aranza, *More Rock Country*, p. 29, as quoted in Frank Garlock and Kurt Woetzel, *Music in the Balance*, p. 146)

In evaluating the effect of rock on America, one secular writer says:

Rock music has one appeal only, a barbaric appeal, to sexual desire—not love, not eros, but sexual desire undeveloped and untutored. . . . The lyrics celebrate puppy love as well as polymorphous attractions, and fortify them against traditional ridicule and shame. (Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, p. 73–74)

Regarding the moral influence of jazz, it is said,

The attendant weakness of jazz is that it is an art without positive moral values, an art that evades those attitudes of restraint and intellectual poise upon which complex civilizations are built. (Elie Sigmester, ed., *The Music Lover's Handbook*, p. 709)

We dare not expose in detail the gross immorality of the performers and those who attend concerts. Suffice it to say, fire and brimstone could, in justice, fall.

Much popular music promotes individualism and rebellion. The spirit of the 1960s antiestablishment music continues. Much of today's music is extremely dissonant and tense. It fuels bitterness and rebellion.

In keeping with the progress of liberalism, popular entertainment generally—and the worst of it in

particular—celebrates the unconstrained self, and savages those who would constrain. People who consume these diversions are, it would appear, fascinated with self, which must be autonomous to be authentic. (Robert H. Bork, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*, p. 125)

And the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states,

It is impossible to arrive at a complete and objective description of a revolutionary movement while it is in progress; only a period of time can provide the necessary perspective. It can be acknowledged, however, that music has never before passed through a more anarchic phase than in the 20th century. (*Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "Music, the History of Western")

Most popular music keeps people from truly thinking. Entertainers want to spellbind their audience. A New Orleans guitarist said about blues singer Bessie Smith:

She could bring about mass hypnotism. (Lillian Erlich, *What Jazz Is All About*, p. 73)

He intended it as a compliment.

Popular music is addictive. Listening to it creates a hunger that *seems* to be filled only when listening to more. Silence becomes a horrid vacuum. A girl attending a conservative Mennonite Bible school pled with the administration, "Please let me spend one night in my car—one night with my music and I'll be all right the rest of the term."

A fourteen-year-old boy said,

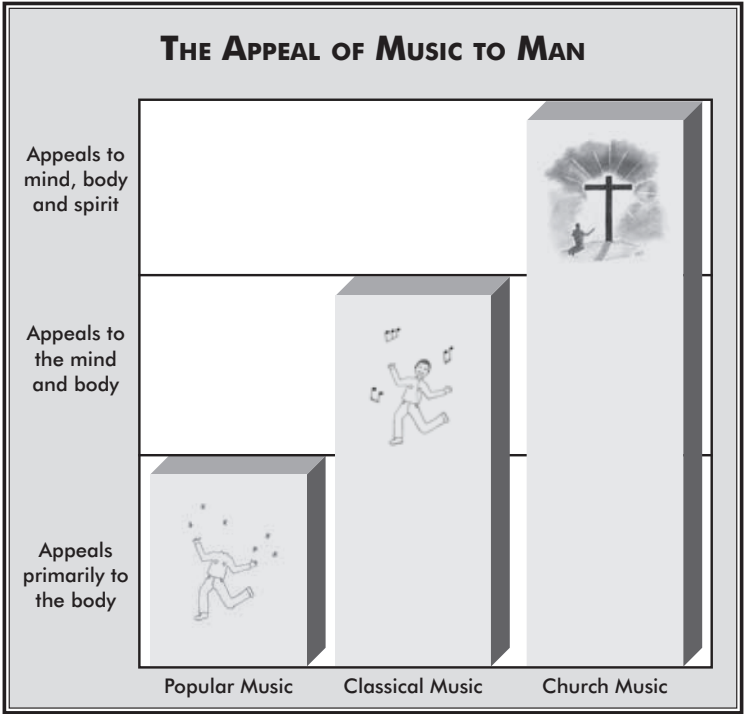
I wake up and listen to music every day. I fall asleep to music every night. It's my life. (Curt Busch, *U.S. News & World Report*, July 8 / July 15, 2002, p. 66)

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A secular evaluation of American culture states,
Today, a very large proportion of young people between the ages of ten and twenty live for music. It is their passion; nothing else excites them as it does; they cannot take seriously anything alien to music. When they are in school and with their families, they are longing to plug themselves back into their music. (Bloom, *Closing*, p. 68)

AND WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Popular music produces idolatry. And the Bible says,
Little children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:21)
Idolaters . . . shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. (Revelation 21:8)



Some popular music carries occult or demonic influences.

And the Bible says,

Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. (Ephesians 5:8–11)

Some popular music produces violence. And the Bible says,

The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace . . . (Galatians 5:19–22)

Most popular music loosens morals. And the Bible says,

Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart. (2 Timothy 2:22)

Much popular music promotes individualism and rebellion.

And the Bible says,

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. (Romans 13:1)

Most popular music keeps people from truly thinking. And the Bible says,

Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure,

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whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

Most popular music is addictive. And the Bible says,

Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? (Romans 6:13, 14, 16)

THE CHRISTIAN AND THE WORLD'S MUSIC

To the Christian, God has given music—music that produces life. Christian music leads man to God; consequently it leads him to life and satisfaction eternal. He has no need or use for the music of this earth.

Perhaps you think that something as evil as popular music poses no threat to alert Christians. But consider the story of Lancaster Mennonite High School (LMH). As recently as the 1960s this school promoted solid worship music in their chorus and chapel services. But in the 1990s, a newspaper from the Lancaster area, in an article titled “Punk Rock of Ages,” reported on a rock festival LMH hosted. The lead singer of “Payable on Death” (one of the bands performing at the concert) dressed in black and sported rows of tattoos on his arms. He said that as he walks through airports, women pull their children to their sides and clutch their purses tighter. “We spend a lot of time proving to other people that we’re Christians,” he said.

How did LMH make the jump from solid worship music to such worldly music? Actually they didn't need to jump, for a bridge links these two spheres. It is called tainted music.

If well I know the tuneful art
To captivate an human heart,
The glory, Lord, be Thine.
A servant of Thy blessed will,
I here devote my utmost skill
To sound the praise divine.

With Tubal's wretched sons no more
I prostitute my sacred power
To please the fiends beneath,
Or modulate the wanton lay,
Or smooth with music's hand the way
To everlasting death.

Suffice for this the season past:
I come great God, to learn at last
The lesson of Thy grace.
Teach me the new, the gospel song
And let my hand, my heart, my tongue
Move only to Thy praise.

—Charles Wesley,
from "The Musician's Hymn"
(Martin E. Ressler, ed.,
The Music Messenger, vol. 13, no. 3)

The Threat of Tainted Music

MANY CHRISTIANS WOULD NOT invite popular music straight from the street into their home. Its immorality and rebellion are too raw. The album covers and the performers look too evil. But when it arrives in sheep's clothing, the world's music finds an open door in many Christian homes and churches. This is the threat of tainted music.

Much music possesses both positive and negative traits. But doesn't all music pull us either up or down? Can any be called amoral, exercising no pull whatsoever toward right or wrong?

In this chapter we will consider music with both good and bad characteristics. But first we will make a few simple contrasts between good music and bad.

HOW DOES THE MUSIC OF HEAVEN DIFFER FROM THAT OF EARTH?

The music of heaven rises heavenward; the music of earth is earthbound. Good music lifts the mind of man

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upward—above the terrestrial and trifling, above the comical and corrupt, above despair and defeat—to the divine. It provides not so much what people want as what they need. It leads toward God.

We can sense the very character and nature of God in good music. Order, beauty, majesty, and sensitivity are there. It sounds like worship, and truth, and heaven—like something that belongs in church.

The music of earth, however, is bound to the nature of man. It expresses that nature, pleases it, and feeds it. It can do nothing else. It sounds like the circus, the bar, the ghetto.

The music of heaven stimulates musings; the music of earth amuses. To muse means “to think deeply” or “meditate” (*Webster’s New World Dictionary*, 1982). Good music makes us muse. It leads us to think deeply about true and solid things that matter. People who want to be led in worship are attracted to this music like bees to flower blossoms.

This music is composed and sung according to the timeless disciplines of music. Those who compose in the heavenly music tradition subject their creativity to the created order of music. Those who sing in this tradition honor the order of music as well.

On the other hand, *to amuse* means “to keep pleasantly occupied” or “to entertain” (*Webster’s*, 1982). The music of earth produces a shallow, lethargic mind. People who don’t want to think become emotionally and mentally addicted to it.

The Threat of Tainted Music

A concerned brother warns of the threat of amusing music, saying,

There is an idle form of worship. Idol worship, I say, in which the soul is amused (detracted from sober meditation) and entertained. While such worship indicates passive participation, it requires neither commitment, concerted effort, nor self-denial. . . . Casual worship brings defeat of spirit, and soul destruction. (Elmer E. Witmer, *The Brotherhood Beacon*, January 1996)

Worshippers sing the music of heaven; entertainers sing the music of earth. How do you tell a worshiper from an entertainer? A lot by where the glory goes. A worshiper directs the glory of his songs to God, while an entertainer soaks it up himself. Entertainers seek to capitalize on the appeal of their person to market their music. On the other hand, worshipers do not seek popularity for themselves or their recordings. In the spirit of the Lord's Prayer, they declare, "May all the glory, forever, be Thine."

Worshippers adore God. They portray themselves in humility, which means, basically, that they don't portray themselves. Many of us have heard that casual poses displayed on the cover of a recording indicate substandard music. But shouldn't we look beyond plain suits and formal poses to the mere idea of picturing singers on album covers? Would not God receive greater glory if the singers were hiding themselves in the shadow of the cross?

One Subject . . . Two Teachers

Lowell Mason (1792–1872) had a vision for improving congregational singing, which had hit a low point in American Protestant churches around the year 1800. He arranged music for congregational singing, taught children in public schools how to sing, and instructed congregations and choirs in primarily vocal music.

Charles Henderson described himself as a vocal coach—one who taught singers how to sing popular songs. He also wrote *How to Sing for Money* to show aspiring singers how to achieve popularity and, thereby, wealth.

Both of these men were teachers, and both taught music to people who wanted to sing. The similarities between them, however, quickly end. Our glimpse into their work is a study of contrasts.

Mason aimed to help churches learn to worship with singing. He said, “The great thing as it appears to me that is to be done is this—to convince the people and make them feel that the music of the church should be a devotional act and not a mere concert or exhibition” (Carol A. Pemberton, *Lowell Mason: His Life and Work*, p. 56). Henderson, meanwhile, taught his pupils, “You are in the business of furnishing entertainment” (Charles Henderson, *How to Sing for Money*, p. 5).

Mason taught individuals to blend in choral singing. He firmly believed “that the tunes used in the churches should be such that all could sing them” (Pemberton, *Mason*, p. 167). Henderson instructed people to distinguish themselves. Here are a few things he said: “Now let’s turn to getting ahead in the world, making money and reputation with your voice” (Henderson, *Sing for Money*, p. 23). “Be

sure there is something basically entertaining under your novelty appeal" (Ibid., p. 296). "A trick that often works is to create a sort of trade-mark for yourself" (Ibid., p. 325).

One minister said of Mason's work: "He aimed to do for the people, not what they most desired, always, but what, according to his judgment, they most needed; less eager to gratify their present taste than to improve and elevate it" (Pemberton, Mason, p. 167). "He avoided change based on 'the excessive desire for novelty' in preference to his sole aim, 'utility'" Ibid., p. 38). He taught that tunes "should be subordinate to the words used, should be the fit and natural expression of the words" (Ibid., p. 167).

On the other hand, Henderson taught that "you must change your stuff superficially from time to time to keep it fresh and in tune with the public taste" (Henderson, *Sing for Money*, p. 290).

Which teacher do you suppose taught those to whom you listen?

SHOULD WE QUESTION THE MINISTRY OF OTHER CHRISTIANS?

Can we challenge the ministry of Christians that use modern methods? Aren't they, after all, still Christian?

Not necessarily. In 2 Corinthians, Paul warns of ministers of Satan who pose as ministers of righteousness. "No marvel," he said, "for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). Paul also wrote, "In the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be . . . lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." He then said how to

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relate to such people. By inspiration of the Holy Ghost, he directs us, “From such turn away” (2 Timothy 3:1, 2, 4, 5).

Peter, as well, prophesied of false Christians in the end times. And in light of the cash handled, the immorality committed, and the fleshly freedoms promised under the umbrella of Christian music, his warning definitely speaks to the issue.

There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies. . . . And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices. . . . They allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption. (2 Peter 2:1, 3, 14, 18, 19)

But can we argue with results? People are being saved through their ministry. Dare we, however, use an end to justify a means? If someone is saved by seeing “Jesus saves” spray painted on a bridge, does that justify Gospel graffiti? No. Neither does someone being saved by tainted music justify worldly Gospel music.

WHAT IS TAINTED MUSIC?

Years ago in the South many slaves were converted to the Christian faith of their white masters. Since they could not attend the churches of the whites, the blacks had their own services and developed a unique singing style.

The strong pulse and repetition of West African religious ceremonies and even the trance state of “spirit possession”

The Threat of Tainted Music

worked their way in acceptable guises into Christian services on Southern plantations. . . .

They embellished their spirituals with haunting vocal effects—the slides, swoops, quavers, and slightly off-pitch notes that were heard in hollers and work songs, and that would be heard again in the blues.

Most important, they transformed the material they borrowed from white hymns by changing the rhythm, shifting the accent from the strong to the weak beats. Spirituals are syncopated. It can be said without irreverence that these noble songs “swing.” (Lillian Erlich, *What Jazz Is All About*, pp. 26, 29, 30)

No doubt, a lot of the blame for this trend in music lies with the whites who failed to set proper examples and to welcome the blacks into their own churches. Wherever the blame lies, however, the result was tainted music.

Tainted music is any mixing of the music of heaven with that of earth. It is the musical blending of anything referring to God or godliness with anything countering Him or His character. Typically, tainted music contains religious words, maybe even the lyrics of an old hymn, while the sound borrows from the world’s popular music. Strange hybrids, like “The All-Saved Freak Band,” result from such mixing.

Tainted music is so popular that secular music companies in the interest of profit proliferate recordings labeled “Christian” and “Gospel.” Dollars—not doctrine—dictate the kind of music they produce under those labels. And what they produce reveals that it is hard to turn a profit when the only appeal is God, but that people will gladly pay for what makes them feel good. A “Gospel” group that raked in more

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than \$11 million in 2003 used concerts described as “a four-hour marathon of hand-clapping, foot-stomping music and laughter” to do so.

In pursuit of popularity, the Christian aspect of contemporary Christian music has been so diluted that

now, when you scan the dial, you can’t find the Christian radio station. The lyrics of a good number of the songs don’t betray anything specifically Christian—they may have some moral message, but not a lot of the big songs are identifiably Christian. (Michael Card, as quoted in *Christianity Today*, May 20, 1996, p. 23)

In other words, Christianity has been tainted into oblivion in what is still supposed to be Christian music. Compare this with the first use of the word *Christian*. Why were the disciples in Antioch called Christians? Because people *identified* Christ in them.

All music belongs to one of the two kingdoms that operate in this world. So where does tainted music belong?

As water tainted with a little sewage is unfit for humans, so music tainted with a little worldly influence is unfit for Christians. In spite of this, however, many churches welcome contemporary Christian music into their worship services. A secular textbook says,

Gospel and Christian music are current genres of commercial, popular music that are intended for both inspiration and entertainment but not normally for worship. Increasingly, however, many churches are including music in their religious services that is in the style of secular, commercial pop and rock groups. (David Willoughby, *The World of Music*, p. 141)

“But my church doesn’t use modern music in its services,” you say. “I don’t attend music concerts. I don’t listen to the radio or watch TV. Surely I’m insulated from tainted music.”

I’m sorry, but you are still vulnerable, for there is a pipeline that will give you the tainted product without going to the source. This pipeline brings popular music from the radio via cassettes or CDs to those without radio. It takes gospel rock or gospel country, dilutes it, and then sends it, minus its label, to an unsuspecting audience. Through this pipeline, music flows smoothly from the heart of Babylon to the ears of the Bride of Christ.

WHY IS TAINTED MUSIC A THREAT?

Tainted music poses various threats. We will consider six of the greatest.

Tainted music threatens the devotional aspect of our singing. Much tainted music fails to bring the soul to its knees before God. Though the lyrics say “God,” the performance shouts “MAN” so loudly that God makes no impression.

Tainted music threatens the Scriptural aspect of our singing. Modern music often gives serious hymns either a flippant or a heavy, grating tone. In many contemporary Christian songs, the lyrics themselves are vague. At times the pronouns *you* and *it* possess no antecedents. The object of affection could be either human or divine. Love could be either romantic or *agape*.

On the other hand, the Scriptures and Scriptural hymns are not bashful with truth. They present it with life-or-death seriousness, which is, after all, the way it is.

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Tainted music threatens the musical aspect of our singing. It fosters an appetite for music that a Christian congregation cannot sing well. Typically, the harmonies in tainted music are too difficult or dissonant for congregational singing. Other music is produced in machine-like precision that cannot be duplicated by ordinary people in real worship.

Instead of encouraging us to sing (as the Bible does), tainted music promotes listening. Others can sing better. Don't embarrass yourself. Let them do it. In this way tainted music destroys our interest in singing and our incentive to learn to sing.

Tainted music arouses the flesh. Worldly merchants use music to sell sin. It rouses the passions and hushes the conscience. Christian lyrics sung with sensual sounds beget the same effect. A secular magazine said of this music:

For those who like to dance and pray at the same time, her stuff can't be beat. (Ralph Novak, *People*, June 24, 1985, as quoted in Frank Garlock and Kurt Woetzel, *Music in the Balance*, p. 93)

"We would leave for the evening with the highest resolve," a Christian sister said of her life before conversion. "But we would listen to music like this and our moral resolve would melt away." She was associating the music of her life in sin with a cappella recordings that she heard playing in conservative Mennonite environments.

Tainted music destroys moral fortitude, producing spiritual anemia. Around A.D. 250, Cyprian, a bishop in North Africa, said,

Satan . . . tempts the ears with harmonious music, so that by the hearing of sweet sounds, we may relax and weaken Christian vigor. (*Still Waters*, p.v)

The Threat of Tainted Music

How much of the spiritual lethargy and defeat among our young people is due to substandard music? No one really knows. But tainted music weakens young souls' preparation for the rigors of Christian experience.

How does absorbing that type of music day after day affect our prayer time? How does it affect the condition of our hearts toward God? How does it affect our ability to stand true in temptation?

Such music blurs spiritual vision. It stunts spiritual growth. It weakens spiritual character.

Tainted music destroys objectivity in relation to music. Listening to inferior music affects how it sounds to us. What startles us on the first hearing will no longer do so the fifth time we listen to it. About the effects of listening to jazz it is said that

the very act of surrendering to its spell destroys automatically the auditor's sense of values, moral or musical. (Elie Siegmeister, ed., *The Music Lover's Handbook*, p. 708)

One brother said,

The key in my experience was getting away from my music for a while. I left it at the advice of others, although I didn't think it was bad, but when I heard it later, it sounded different. I could see why others had concerns.

Listening to tainted music makes us hunger for music more heavily seasoned with the world's sounds. It directs our desires worldward. It eases the slide into worldly culture. A concerned father said about tainted music, "It's changing the character of our people."

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BUT IS THE CHURCH MUSIC OF YESTERYEAR

RELEVANT TODAY?

Many in the music world say no. And many churches say no. “To serve our culture we must stay abreast of it,” they declare, “and church hymns are too foreign to our culture to reach our culture.” A council member in a church with many members from the community said, “In atmosphere, you can’t distinguish our worship services from a secular gathering. People attending for the first time feel at home. They connect with our music and can sing it.”

Some try to separate the lyrics from the sound, saying,

We should be conservative fundamentalists when it comes to content and liberals when it comes to containers. (Bobby Hill, as quoted in *Christianity Today*, January 8, 2001)

But where does this approach lead?

One music group with the goal of serving a “mission field in the mainstream” finds that mainstream twenty-one-and-older clubs solicit their music. And they go sing. But do they preach the Gospel? That is the question.

Trying to console concerned Christians, a singer with the band *Rock and Roll Worship Circus* said,

In any Christian subculture, members will push the limits of grace in order to find their identity. (as quoted in *Christianity Today*, July 2003, p. 50)

A rock star said,

I’m a Christian, but at times I feel very removed from Christianity. (Bono, as quoted in *Christianity Today*, March 2003, p. 43)

**What Do We Mean by
"Church Music"?**

In the past, many denominations employed four-part singing and sang worship hymns. This church music has served the demands of worship well. What are its defining features?

1. It is Biblical and devotional. Its message corresponds with Scripture and its tone with the character of God.

2. It is composed within the bounds of normal human ability. Groups of people without extensive training can join in singing this music with pleasing results. Everyone can teach and admonish one another according to the directives in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16.

3. It is moderate in its appeal to the body and emotions. Those who compose in this tradition seek to enhance the message of the song with their music. They avoid contradicting or overpowering the lyrics. Though simple enough to be sung by the congregation, this music is rich enough to make meaningful impressions and to allow for beautiful expression.

4. It has a consistent beat pattern. It flows with normal body rhythms in a way that does not disturb us physically or emotionally.

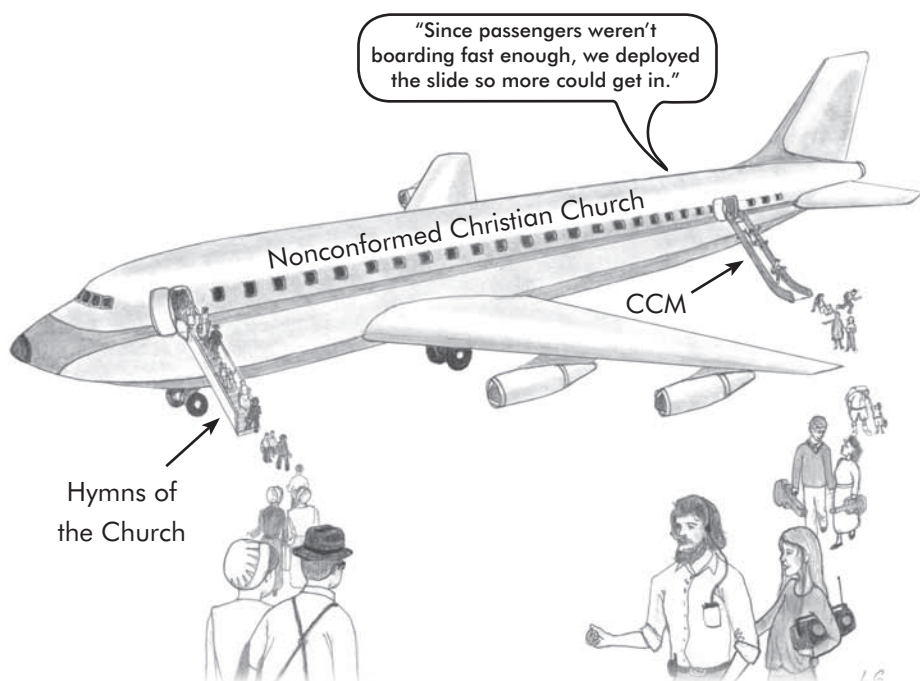
5. The tension developed in its harmonies is resolved within the harmonies. The tension that is developed through dissonant chords or through chord progressions is resolved by harmonic chords and cadences (harmonic endings). Instability in the harmonies is resolved by stability. The instability and dissonance in the harmonies are moderate enough to allow for congregational singing.

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A popular Christian artist said of her efforts to reach both the church and world,

Of course I have no life, but I feel like I can do both. (Jaci Velásquez, as quoted in *World*, May 13, 2000, p. 20)

The idea that Christians should produce music relevant to popular culture lacks a Biblical base. In Chapter 3 we found that, according to the New Testament, music is for (1) *expressing godly sentiments*, (2) *edifying the church*, and (3) *exalting God*. We found nothing about producing culturally relevant music to fulfill the Great Commission. The life of Jesus fits with this teaching. We read of Him singing with His disciples, but nothing about Him witnessing to sinners in song.



The Threat of Tainted Music

Regarding the ability of culturally relevant music to add souls to the church, it is said that

the pop Gospel scene is a high-powered, multi-colored, glossily-packed, heavily-promoted industry. But when the music stops and the applause dies down and the lights go out and the cash is counted and the show moves on, what is left behind is only a microscopic fraction of what seemed to be. When there is that kind of difference between the headline and the bottom line, then something is drastically wrong. (John Glencher, England)

This is not to say that Christian singing does not make an impact upon unbelievers. It can. And it should. But what kind of song makes the right kind of impact on sinners? And where can we find that song?

Psalm 40:3 answers both of these questions:

He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.

Music that seeks to be relevant in worldly culture fails to edify the church. The church council member who boasted of the cultural relevance of his church's music also lamented, "Our constitution requires us to add members to the church council due to our size, but we have no qualified members."

In the light of the three Biblical purposes for music, the church music of yesteryear is still relevant. Christians still have—at least should have—the same godly sentiments to express. What the church requires in order to be edified does not change much with time or place or race. God is eternally the same—what exalted Him still exalts Him.

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Do we mean that old music is good and new music is bad? Not at all. Songs written according to the timeless qualities of good music will serve to enrich and promote the spiritual blessings of the church music tradition.

IS MY MUSIC TAINTED?

Granted, that is a personal question—but one we should be asking ourselves if we listen to recorded music. Christians are called to prove all things and hold fast to those which are good (1 Thessalonians 5:21). *All* obviously includes music, whether we sing it or listen to it.

We should also, no doubt, be asking others their opinion about our music. For tainted music destroys objectivity, making us poor judges of what we hear. One way to regain objectivity is to quit listening to recorded music for a time, several months, perhaps. During that time, sing decidedly devotional hymns. After your mind is cleared of your previous music, consider it in the light of the following points.

1. *Does my music entertain me, or does it lead me in worship?* Is my music so difficult or so precise that only exceptional people or professionals can sing it? If so, it leads away from worshipping God to worshipping human skill and achievement.

Do my songs address God with less respect than I would use when speaking to the American president?

Does my music feature dramatic or unpredictable musical arrangements, or a heavy or fast beat? Such music readily moves the emotions or body, but usually leaves the spirit untouched.

The Threat of Tainted Music

2. *Does my music instigate rebellion or impurity within me? Does it console me regarding any such thing in my life?* Before quickly answering, “Of course not,” consider that the effect of music is often more subtle than that of romance novels or pornography.

One young man, a professing Christian, would defy his father’s authority and then stomp to his room in anger and turn up his contemporary, a cappella gospel music. It is obvious that although the words of the songs should have convicted him, it was the music which fed his rebellion and comforted him in it.

Do the singers you listen to present themselves in intimate closeness? A soft, whispery voice speaks intimacy. A microphone in the mouth puts a sensual mouth to our ear. An arm around our shoulder will not lead us to worship God in the beauty of HOLINESS.

Is your music tainted with country and western? Country and western is drawing and warm, though melancholy. In its raw form it glamorizes illicit love, but even its diluted forms provide comfort in failure and sin. “Don’t condemn yourself,” it says; “why, you’re no worse than anyone else.”

Do the singers you listen to scoop and slide on and off the notes? Such singing expresses an unprincipled, accommodating view of life.

Is your music heavily syncopated? Syncopation (the recurrent accenting of a normally weak beat) builds tension. So does an unnaturally slow or fast beat. Our body reacts to beats that fall outside the range of normal heartbeat.

Are the harmonies in your music tense? Unresolved tension harms Christians. Such music sympathizes with the heart that holds out against authority. A young married sister once

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heard such music while traveling. “It made me want to insist on getting my own way once I got home,” she confessed.

3. *Does my music have highly repetitive lyrics or music?* Such music breaks the natural law of variety within order. It affects the body and emotions while leaving the mind to freewheel. Incessant, evenly accented beats stress our bodies—especially at unnatural tempos.

4. *Is my music addictive?* Music that binds you to itself is fleshly. Pure music releases you to praise and sing in the freedom of the Spirit. Tainted music increases your desire for more, while decreasing the satisfaction you receive from it.

Perhaps you see quite a bit of your music as being in a gray area: basically good, but having some traces of modern influence. Here are a few more questions that may simplify the matter:

How does your music sound to a passerby? Would someone wishing to escape the pollution of the world be attracted to you by the distinctive heavenliness of your music?

Does your music increase your appreciation for, and your interest and participation in, the congregational singing in your church?

And, finally, does the tone of your music harmonize with your dreams of the music of heaven?

HOW CAN I BE CLEANSED FROM TAINTED MUSIC?

Perhaps at this point you are uneasy about some of your tapes or CDs. Perhaps you feel confused about music, and

The Threat of Tainted Music

wish God would not make life so complicated. But if you are a born-again believer, take courage. You are not in a corner. God wants to make music a tremendous blessing to you. God will lift you from confusion or guilt. Will you let Him?

One brother tells how God mercifully intervened in his experience:

I was eighteen years old, a Christian . . . and had a love/hate relationship with contemporary Christian music. I loved the spine-tingling and soul-stirring capabilities of this type of music, and felt good about the fact that it was actually musical, not hard or acidic like Christian rock. But I also hated this music—though not as much as I loved it. I hated it because it made me listen to it even when I didn't really want to. And I hated it too because, while I wanted to be a close friend to the wonderful and holy Christ I saw in the New Testament, this contemporary Christian music got between Him and me.

One day, at the end of lunch break on the job, I popped a cassette into the tape player in the car. "It's really time to get to work, but just this song yet. Ooh, isn't that music incredible!" I reveled in the high it gave me. I glanced at my watch. It said 1:06. "Okay, this has to be the last song, and back to work we go."

That evening, my dad, who had been on the road that day making sales calls for our product, said, "Today I had something very strange happen to me. It was just a few minutes after one o'clock when an overwhelming sense of dread came over me regarding your safety. I almost stopped the car to search for a phone from which to make a call to see what was happening, but finally turned it all over to God. Please tell me what was happening on the job at a little past one today."

God could not have spoken more clearly if He had shouted from the heavens. I was now convinced that

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contemporary Christian music had to go. This time I pitched it irretrievably, cried out to God for forgiveness for being so stubborn so long, and thanked Him for doing something He had no obligation to do—to shout so loud.

Before, it had seemed impossible to quit this music. Once I listened to God and quit, I didn't even miss it. And so began a time of purifying in my life. There were other things that needed attention, but the music had to go first, before I could even begin to hear God on those things. When it did go out the door, I could hear the voice of God again, clearly!

—Daniel R. Huber

Praise God for His mercy! But do not presume upon that mercy. If you know what is right in relation to music, God wants you to simply do it. He has not promised to shout.

Jesus promised discernment to those willing to do His will. He said,

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. (John 7:17)

The first *will* in this verse means “to determine.” When we determine to do God's will—whatever it may be—then God gives us spiritual discernment.

God has given us our parents and church authority for our spiritual safety. Cooperating fully with them in music issues leads toward cleansing, but God is the one who cleanses. To receive His cleansing, you must live close to Him, in communion with Him. Hungrily feeding on His Word will clear your mind and cleanse your heart.

“Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Psalm 119:9).

The Threat of Tainted Music

Unhealthy music, however, may have you bloated (full, but not satisfied), and you may need to lay recorded music aside for a while to sharpen your spiritual appetite. And as you satisfy that sharpened appetite, it will, in turn, clarify your perspective of music.

Still let us on our guard be found,
And watch against the power of sound,
With sacred jealousy;
Lest haply sense should damp our zeal,
And music's charms beguile and steal
Our hearts away from thee.

—Charles Wesley,
from "Jesus, Thou Source of All Our Joys,"
(*Christian Hymnary*, 674)

What About Musical Instruments?

“OUR STANDARD AGAINST musical instruments no longer makes sense,” Michael told his friend Joel. “Many a cap-pella tapes are far worse than some that have instrumental accompaniment. In fact, Raymond calls his wildest a cap-pella tapes ‘rockappella.’ ”

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Bible first mentions music in Genesis 4:21. It says that Cain’s descendent, Jubal, “was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ.”

Later, in Numbers 10, God instructed Moses to make two silver trumpets to sound alarms and announce new months, special days, and certain offerings. They were not used to play tunes or accompany vocal singing, but are the closest thing to musical instruments God commanded Moses to make.

God’s people, however, freely used musical instruments in the Old Testament era. For example, Samuel told Saul that he would meet “a company of prophets coming down from the high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a

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harp” (1 Samuel 10:5). And when King David brought home the ark, he “and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with harps, and with psalteries, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets” (1 Chronicles 13:8). He also appointed *four thousand* men to praise the Lord with the instruments he had (1 Chronicles 23:5). According to the Jewish historian Josephus, Solomon made forty thousand brass harps and psalteries to be used in the temple he built (*The Works of Josephus*, p. 218, William Whiston, trans.).

Numerous psalms—for example, Psalm 150—command to praise God with various musical instruments. These Spirit-inspired commands show clearly that God approved—and even invited—the use of musical instruments in worship.

The woe Amos pronounces upon those who “invent to themselves instruments of music like David” may seem to contradict the Psalms’ directives to use instruments. Instead, it condemns apostate Israelites for living in carnal extravagance. They pampered themselves with costly cosmetics, plush furniture, rich meats, and instrumental music, but had no concern for their spiritual condition. It appears that Amos was not condemning the eating of meat nor the use of instruments, but their misuse by a spiritually impoverished people. (see Amos 6:1–6.)

The Israelites hung their harps on the willows of Babylon and refused to sing the songs of Zion for their captors (Psalm 137:1–4). In the postexilic period, it seems that the use of musical instruments declined. At the time of Christ, the Jews may have been using only the shofar, a trumpet of ram or

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goat horn. Incidentally, that non-melodic instrument is the only one used in orthodox Jewish ritual today.

Though the Israelites used musical instruments extensively, they were not the predominate aspect of their singing.

Hebrew music was primarily vocal. (*The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, p. 893)

The music of the Hebrews was in every sense of the word a vocal music. The voice transcended and outdid the instrument, and instrumental development stood still. (*University Musical Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, p. 41)

The Old Testament faithful relied on many tangibles to prompt and preserve heart worship. Besides musical instruments, they used blood, gold, fire, and incense. They met God at a specified place—first the tabernacle and later the temple—and through detailed rituals God had specified. In worship they washed themselves, killed animals, burnt incense, offered bread, and played instruments. All these worked from the outside to bring their hearts to worship and praise.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Jesus changed many Old Testament practices with “It hath been said . . . but I say unto you.” Did He make such a statement about music?

No. When talking with the Samaritan woman by the well, however, He referred to a shift from worship coached by externals to spontaneous worship, worship in spirit and truth. The woman confronted Jesus with the controversy between the Jews and the Samaritans over the place to worship, a significant tangible. Jesus replied, “The hour cometh, when ye

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shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father.” The object-coached worship of the Old Testament did not survive the change in covenants. It was a figure of the Spirit-directed, truth-based worship of the New Testament.

The Bible says nothing of Jesus or the early church using instruments. Jesus, however, did *sing* a hymn with His disciples prior to His arrest, and Paul and Silas *sang* praises to God in jail at midnight. Hebrews 2:12 pictures Jesus in the midst of the church *singing* praises to God.

The New Testament contains three direct commands to sing vocally. Two nearly identical passages command us to be “speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19), and to be “teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16). The other direct command is found in James 5:13: “Is any merry? let him sing psalms.”

The simplest understanding of these verses indicates that God wants the church to sing with voices. Further study, however, reveals that a Greek word used twice in these passages can imply the use of instruments. This word, however, does not make these passages say anything other than what we receive from reading them in the King James Version. (For further discussion on this original word see Appendix D.)

The New Testament does mention musical instruments. Jesus referred to children in the marketplace saying they had *piped* (Matthew 11:17). Paul mentioned a *sounding brass* and a *tinkling cymbal* in 1 Corinthians 13:1 and a *pipe* and a *harp*

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in 1 Corinthians 14:7. But the New Testament contains no commands to use instruments, nor gives any example of the early church doing so.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS AND THE EARLY CHURCH

Around A.D. 195, Clement of Alexandria wrote about the practice of the early church,

The one instrument of peace, the Word alone by whom we honor God, is what we employ. We no longer employ the ancient psaltery, trumpet, timbrel, and flute. For those expert in war and scorers of the fear of God were inclined to make use of these instruments in the choruses at their festive assemblies. . . . Yet, even if you wish to sing and play to the harp or lyre, there is no blame. You will imitate the righteous Hebrew king in his thanksgiving to God. (David Bercot, *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, p. 467)

Clement appears to be saying that although they did not use instruments in their gatherings for worship, they did allow individuals to use the harp and the lyre. He warned, however, that

if people occupy their time with pipes, psalteries, choirs, dances, Egyptian clapping of hands, and such disorderly frivolities, they become quite immodest. (Bercot, *Dictionary*, p. 467)

Later, around A.D. 235, Novation said,

One imitates the hoarse, warlike clanging of the trumpet. Another with his breath blowing into a pipe regulates its mournful sounds. . . . Why should I speak of . . . those great tragic vocal ravings? Why should I speak of strings set vibrating with noise? Even if these things were not dedicated to idols, they should not be approached and gazed upon by faithful Christians. (Bercot, *Dictionary*, p. 468)

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Most scholars conclude that the early church did not use instrumental music.

The early Christians refused to have anything to do with the instrumental music which they might have inherited from the ancient world. (*A History of Music*, p. 42)

The early Christians followed the example of the synagogue; and when they celebrated the praise of God in Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual Songs, their melody was the fruit of their lips. For many centuries after this period, the use of instrumental music was unknown in the Church. (*The Ancient Church*, as quoted by Ronald Border in *My Testimony Concerning Musical Instruments*, p. 11)

Some historians feel that the church accepted instruments in the seventh century, others say in the thirteenth. Thomas Aquinas gives support for the later date by writing in 1250,

Our church does not use musical instruments, as harps and psalteries, to praise God withal, that we may not seem to Judaize. (*McClintock and Strong's Encyclopedia*, Vol. VIII, p. 739 [as quoted in *Instrumental Music in Church Worship*])

Whether accepted in the seventh or the thirteenth century, the fact remains that as the church slid into apostasy, she reverted to more externals in worship. As she became spiritually crippled, she used more crutches such as images, incense, crucifixes, and musical instruments to keep her worship hobbling along.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN THE REFORMATION AND OTHER REVIVAL MOVEMENTS

What did the reformers and other revivalists do with these tangible worship aids?

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Ulrich Zwingli, a Swiss Reformer, . . . abolished organs as well as other music, vestments, pictures, and anything else that would detract from the centrality of the Word. (Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old and New*, p. 111)

Though he later changed his mind, John Calvin abolished instruments in the beginning of his reforms (Webber, *Worship*, p. 199). He said,

Instrumental music is not fitter to be adopted into the public worship of the Christian Church than the incense, the candlestick, and the shadows of the Mosaic Law. (Eugene W. Burford, Sr., *The Voice of the Ages Against Instrumental Music in Worship*, p. 5; also quoted in Joseph and Christian Stoll, *The Songs We Sing*, p. 47)

It was said of the Anabaptists in the 1930s, that

[musical instruments] have never been sanctioned in the public services of the main body of the Mennonite Church. They are used by some other branches of Mennonites. Some of the arguments against their use in this manner are: (1) their cost, (2) their origin (Gen. 4:21), (3) their destruction of congregational singing, (4) their interference with collective worship in singing, (5) no New Testament sanction for their use. (*Mennonite Cyclopedic Dictionary*, 1930, p. 257)

The response of the Reformation to musical instruments has been summarized this way:

In the early days of the Reformation the more radical reformers, e.g., Zwingli, Calvin, and the Anabaptists, discarded the use of musical instruments. (*The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, p. 794)

In their reforms the Puritans took radical steps toward simplicity in music.

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In the height of their power in England, the Puritans had dissolved church choirs, destroyed organs and other instruments, and even rebelled against the use of such simple arrangements of the Psalter as those devised by Thomas Ravenscroft. After persuasion by their clergy, based on scriptural texts, the great mass of Puritans consented that a plain melody might be used, and the psalms sung. (*University Musical Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, p. 3)

When John Wesley was asked about introducing instruments of music into Methodist chapels, he replied,

I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither HEARD nor SEEN. (*Adam Clarke's Commentary*, notes on Amos 6:5)

In summary of the response of revival groups to instrumental music, a Methodist work published in 1930 states,

Practically all the older orthodox denominations excluded its use for approximately the first century of their existence in their primitive simplicity and spiritual prosperity. (*Instrumental Music in Public Worship* [as quoted in Burford, *The Voice of the Ages*, p. 11])

The Anabaptist Movement followed this pattern of first rejecting instruments and then later accepting them. Instruments were introduced into Anabaptist worship services when a Mennonite church in Germany installed a pipe organ in 1764. By 1905, only seven Mennonite churches in the Netherlands were yet without an organ; and that because they lacked funding. Many American Mennonites accepted instruments in their worship services around the beginning of the twentieth century (*Mennonite Encyclopedia*, pp. 792–793).

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS TODAY

What about us? Should we use musical instruments?

Christians do not all answer the same. How does the Lord answer the question? As followers of Christ, we look to the New Testament for our direction. Sing, it simply commands, “making melody in your heart to the Lord.” See Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. This is how God wants us to praise Him.

Even if instruments may not honor God, can they enhance our Christian experience? After all, many musical instruments make a very pleasant sound.

Jesus said we must worship God in spirit and in truth. Musical instruments make very little—if any—appeal to the mind (truth) and spirit. They speak the language of the body and the emotions, so

George R. Brunk I Shares His Testimony

I do not oppose the instruments because they are not pleasing to me by nature, but because they are inconsistent with the divine simplicity and self-denial which are the very foundation qualities of Christian character.

Were I living for self and had it in my power, I would live in a palace fitted out with the finest furniture, musical instruments and all. I would have a large park with shade trees and ponds, and all filled with rare and curious animals. I would have spouting fountains and fine statuary. . . .

This would be the self-life. It would be wrong because I would be expending for my pleasure what I should have used for the salvation of souls. Musical instruments belong in the same class as the above. (*Gospel Witness*, January 25, 1906, as quoted in J.C. Wenger, *Faithfully*, Geo. R., p. 62)

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they lack the strength to improve the edification aspect of our singing.

Musical instruments tend to produce a shallow, emotion-oriented worship and experience. Sunday-morning worshipers may assemble to the sweet strains of instrumental music. They relax. Their turbulent emotions calm. They feel that they experience the presence of God, and truly worship. That feeling gives both their life and experience a stamp of authenticity. But often what they call worship is a mere stirring of the emotions. As humans, we tend to be satisfied by an experience that carries our emotions, although it has provided little, or nothing, for our mind and spirit.

A brother who loved worldly instrumental music in his youth said,

The church did not approve of it and finally I gave it up. When I decided to do that, I was giving up music—period. I thought I would never enjoy music again. But God has restored to me the joy of music—of better music.

Since instruments do not help us obey the New Testament directives to sing to the Lord and to edify one another, surely God is pleased when we do not use them. In accepting them, we have little to gain and much to lose. Let us follow the example of many faithful believers who, in their efforts to worship in spirit and truth, did not employ musical instruments.

The Music of Man's Heart

Since ever the world was fashioned,
 Water and air and sod,
A music of divers meaning
 Has flowed from the hand of God.
In valley and gorge and upland,
 On stormy mountain height,
He makes Him a harp of a forest,
 He sweeps the chords with might.
He puts forth His hand to the ocean,
 He speaks and the waters flow;
Now in a chorus of thunder,
 Now in a cadence low.
He touches the waving flower bells,
 He plays on the woodland streams,
A tender song as a mother
 Sings to her child in dreams.
But the music Divinest and dearest,
 Since ever the years began,
Is the manifold passionate music
 He draws from the heart of man.

—from C.F. Derstine,
The Sheet Music of Heaven, p. 10

Is There Not a Cause?

GOLIATH LEERED AT THE Israelite army. “Give me a man that we may fight together,” he cried. The Israelites looked up into the face of evil, trembled, and then ran to safety.

Safety? Were they safe as they cowered in their tents with the enemy’s taunts ringing in their ears? Not when they refused to fight the needed battle.

Then a farm boy arrived on the battlefield. He heard Goliath’s taunts and saw fear in the faces of God’s people. “Is there not a cause?” David asked. He knew there was, and stepped forward to take the challenge. “The LORD . . . will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine,” he declared.

Satan has declared war on godly music. He hurls his challenges to the church. And from the church is heard . . .

“The way we’ve been singing is good enough.”

“Music, in itself, is amoral.”

“The familiar hymns are worn out. Give us something fresh.”

“We’re glad Christians now have a wide variety of music to choose from.”

“Even worldlings will listen to the Christian music we have now. What a tool for evangelism!”

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Many parents and church leaders waver when responding to Satan's musical challenges. Some of their replies are valid but timid. Elsewhere in the Christian camp, silence reigns.

We must face Satan's challenges. If we do not face them, God's armies will tremble helplessly in the face of a great enemy. I repeat David's question—is there not a cause?

Following are some scenes from today's battlefield. Consider what steps a modern David could have taken to save each situation.



The song leader behind the podium barely lifts his eyes as he announces the number. He fidgets as he waits for the congregation to find the song, and when he blows his pitch pipe, it makes no sound. He blows harder; still nothing. Red creeps above his collar as in a strained voice he begins to sing, too low, too softly. He moves his hand in the pattern his schoolteachers told him was correct for 4/4 timing. Two strong sopranos see his plight and raise their voices to help him, but they don't blend with each other. At the end of the third song, some people in the congregation are embarrassed and some are disheartened. Very few are blessed.

Satan is satisfied that so few were encouraged by the singing that night and that no one took up the challenge.

Is there not a cause?



A few youth huddle together after a church service. One says, "Let's make a CD," and the others agree. Once a week,

six of the best singers get together to practice. They use a songbook they bought at a local, religious bookstore. They imitate several vocal techniques they have heard on other recordings. As they practice, they comment to each other, “Ooo, that sounds good. Our CD is really going to sell; it’s got the right sound.” And after months of practice, when the tape and CD are released, they really do sell. The singers make a modest profit and begin practicing for another recording. “God has given us a ministry of song,” they rejoice.

Satan is satisfied because the recordings attract people to the singers instead of to God, and no one challenges them.

Is there not a cause?



After the farewells are said at Bible school, a young brother approaches Calvin.

“Here, you can just have this tape,” he says as he hands Calvin a cassette. As Calvin guides his late-model four-door car around the wooded curves toward home, he lets the tape play on and on.

“Now let us have a little talk with Jesus,
Let us tell Him all about our troubles,
He will hear our faintest cry
And He will answer by and by;
Now when you feel a little prayer wheel turning,
And you know a little fire is burning,
You will find a little talk with Jesus makes it right.”

Calvin likes the feeling the spirited singing gives him. That night, after he arrives home, tells his Bible school stories, and unpacks his suitcases, he kneels by his bed to pray. But he

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doesn't have the same burden he had at Bible school. He stays on his knees out of habit, stiffly thanking God for a safe trip home, and asking Him to keep him safe during the night. Then he crawls into bed.

Satan is satisfied because through shallow music, Calvin's prayer burden has become merely a little talk with Jesus, and Calvin doesn't know why.

Is there not a cause?



"The songs have a good message," a young man says, "and the singers are dedicated Christians. They sing in prisons across the country, and many people have come to know the Lord through their ministry." His father is unsure how to respond, so his eighteen-year-old son keeps listening to his library of modern-sounding recordings while his distaste grows for the hymns of the church. When he is appointed song leader for the year, he avoids the deep, devotional hymns and teaches the congregation some of the light songs he has learned from his CDs.

Satan is satisfied because the music is leading the church from objective, truth-centered worship to a subjective, feelings-oriented experience. And no one has challenged the change.

Is there not a cause?



These stories are not about specific people or places. They simply represent what happens in conservative circles.

Not all is lost, however. At various places, Christians answer Satan's challenge with a rush of vibrant song. In church, they sing together with freedom and spirit. Even if the song leader is not an expert, he does his best, and sings from the heart. At home, Mother sings with her daughters as they wash dishes. Father and the boys sing at work. Their simple singing is the precise and deadly response of a David to Goliath. There is a cause, indeed. But who will face the challenge? Will you?

BUT WHAT CAN I DO?

Do what David the shepherd boy did. Although he was young and crudely armed, he dedicated all he was and had to the service of his great God. Through him, God miraculously routed the enemy. As you give your talents to Him, He will help you to route the enemy.

Don't worry about your lack of experience. Don't worry about your lack of knowledge. Don't worry about your timidity. Just give what you are to God. Respond when He touches your heart with the truth. God will call you to the battlefield. You will encounter the challenge of the enemy in this matter of music. By God's grace, face it.

Chapter 9

Fierce may be the conflict,
Strong may be the foe,
But the King's own army
None can overthrow:
Round His standard ranging
Vict'ry is secure;
For His truth unchanging
Makes the triumph sure.
Joyfully enlisting,
By Thy grace divine,
We are on the Lord's side,
Saviour, we are Thine.

—*Frances R. Havergal*,
from "Who Is on the Lord's Side?"
(*Church Hymnal*, 516)

A Singing People

I waited patiently for the LORD; and he . . . heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit . . . and set my feet upon a rock. . . . And he hath put a new song in my mouth. (Psalm 40:1–3)

WHEN GOD SAVED YOU, He gave you reasons to sing. He removed your guilt and gave you eternal hope. He, as Holy Spirit, came to live with you and produce His sweet fruit in you. This puts a song in your heart.

In this book, we have considered the nature and the roots of various kinds of music. We have sounded warnings against hybridizing God's new song with the old song of the world. We have tried to provide some guidance in music interests. All this is necessary. But by themselves these things will not answer the devil's challenges to our singing.

His challenges must be met with song.

We must be a singing people. To be a singing people, we first of all need spiritual health—peace with God and a heartfelt joy, which moves us to sing. Second, we need good songs—songs that express our hearts, our beliefs, and our worship. Third, we must know how to sing. People possessing these three assets will be a singing people in the home, in the school, and in the church.

Chapter 10

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE HOME

If the family that prays together stays together, surely the family that sings together clings together. When you learn that a family loves to sing together, you learn something positive about relationships in the family. So we covet a singing family. How can we have one?

Parents wanting a singing family must sing. Sing to your babies and toddlers. Sing with your children as soon as they can help. Lead them by introducing new songs. Make singing a regular and enjoyable part of family worship. That is easy to do with preschoolers, but as your children mature, you will have to do more to keep them involved in family singing. Try having weekly theme songs. Learn new songs together. Teach them a variety of songs, but steer clear of the light and foolish. Get the children to start and lead songs. Help them learn to sing parts. Capture their interest in such things while they have it. Challenge their musical ability. Commend them when they do well; coach them when they fail.

Children should learn to carry a tune and to harmonize with others *before* they go to school. A child's ability to learn these skills seems to be declining by the time he goes to school, and deteriorates rapidly in later childhood. The school should try to help students who are unable do these things, but it cannot make up for the opportunities parents missed in early childhood. Take an interest in the songs your children learn at school. Sing them together at home.

But, you may say, "I don't know how to sing. How can I help my children learn?" It is going to be difficult, but not impossible. A few suggestions . . . Get a good singer to come and

have “singing hour” once a week with your preschoolers. Invite a “singing” family over on a Sunday evening and sing together. Sing along with good recorded music, and get your children to do the same. All your efforts to teach your young children to sing will be repaid many times as they grow up singing.

As your children grow into youth, safeguard your home against using music as entertainment. Guide the use of recorded music. It can help you learn new songs and provide occasional inspiration. But using recorded music as entertainment will produce shallow spirituality in your offspring. You don’t need a degree in theology or hymnology to condemn a worldly music tape. If it doesn’t sound right, you have the authority—yea, the responsibility—to free your home of it.

And youth, please accept your parents’ guidance. You don’t have to understand all their thinking to willingly subject yourself to their direction. Chafing may win you a certain tape or CD, but it will kill the song in your heart.

Christian families should be known in their communities for their singing. Over three hundred years ago Richard Baxter wrote:

And Godly Families have still been differenced from the ungodly by open [ly] singing the Praises of God, when the other sing wanton and idle songs. Good Christians will not be ashamed, that such Psalms of Praise be heard by their Neighbors into the Streets, when Players, or Ballad-singers are not ashamed, more openly to sing amorous, foolish, ungodly, or abusive Songs. (*Paraphrase of the Psalms of David in Meter*, 1692, as quoted in Albert Edward Bailey, *The Gospel in Hymns*, p. 13)

Chapter 10

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

Lowell Mason stressed the importance of teaching music in school by saying,

A solid music education for all children is the only means of genuine reform in church music. (Carol A. Pemberton, *Lowell Mason: His Life and Work*, p. 40-41)

What is a solid music education? It is teaching children good songs and how to sing them. But it must be more. It must also spur the children's interest and involvement in singing. Actually teaching children *to sing* is more urgent than teaching them *how to sing*.

The school board should have a clear vision of how they want the singing in their school to be conducted. If you are a school board member, it should be important to you that your school sings well—important enough that you give the teachers practical help in problem areas. Does your lower-grade teacher know how to help the monotone student? Does your upper-grade teacher need to stimulate interest in singing in his room? Help your teachers find solutions to such problems. If your teachers are not musical enough to teach music and stimulate interest in it, appoint a good music teacher. Consider having weekly chorus directed by the most inspirational song leader in your congregation. The school's approach to music affects somewhat the singing of the church now. Later it will affect it to a tremendous degree. The school provides some of the best opportunities to improve church singing.

The school faculty should know what goals and convictions the board has about music and then pursue them. If the board is passive in the matter, then the teachers carry a

greater responsibility. More than anything else, teachers, your students need an inspirational leader. If your school's singing consists of dragging through a few hymns every morning, you may be hindering your students more than helping them. Your students will likely leave your school looking for something fresh and be drawn into hybridized music.

Select your songs to fit the age and ability of your students. Then challenge them to tackle the more difficult. Sing a variety of songs. Use a variety of books if you have access to them. When planning music class, remember that it is more important that scholars learn the basic rudiments well than that they learn technical details unnecessary for vocal singing. When you sing together, call on your students to practice the rudiments you are learning.

The songs children learn for special occasions like school programs can make a deep impression. When you choose these songs, think about what you want the children to carry for life instead of what you think will impress the audience for a few minutes.

Lead your students to discover the joy of singing. Commend and encourage. Draw out the self-conscious and timid. Discipline expressions of the anti-singing spirit. When your class knows how to sing and loves it, you have succeeded in giving them a solid music education.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE CHURCH

To the church leaders, let me say this: your responsibility for your church's singing goes beyond picking song leaders and hymnals. You need a vision of what congregational singing can

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be and do in your church. If you feel your singing is lacking, take note of congregations that are doing better and notice *how* they are getting those results. Be humble enough to ask questions and to change your unproductive methods.

A congregation's singing should give the singers the freedom to sing what is in their hearts. Such singing pulls the singers, instead of them needing to push it. Are you inspired and fed by the singing in your services? When you are, and the congregation knows it, you are an example for them to follow.

Here are a few suggestions for improving your congregation's singing. Seriously encourage singing in the homes. If the singing in your school is poor, urge the board to find a remedy. On occasion provide your youth with an inspirational leader so that they can sing together. Singing classes for the church can be helpful, but should not be mired in technicalities. They should be inspirational and teach the congregation to sing together.

Do not be afraid to have the best song leaders do most of the leading in your worship services. If one leader succeeds in leading the group to really sing while the others cannot, have him instruct the rest.

Wholehearted congregational singing safeguards against the enticements of tainted music. But ministers need to teach and warn as well, and give members guidance regarding their music interests. What people feed on in private will, eventually, affect the group thinking about music. That makes it worthy of your attention.

To preach well, the preacher must know his Bible; to lead singing well, the song leader must know his hymnal. If you are considered a song leader in your church, spend time at

home with your hymnals. Perhaps you will want to sing from them in your personal devotions. Your goal is to lead the congregation in worship, and to do that you must be inspired yourself. The songs you lead must mean something to you before you can help them mean something to someone else.

Too often, congregational singing is tense. The leader can help the congregation relax and sing freely if he is relaxed and pours himself into the songs. If you are nervous when leading, seek God's help to overcome your self-consciousness. Face the fact that your preoccupation with yourself hinders your effectiveness as a song leader. Consciously redirect your focus to God, the meaning of the hymns you lead, and the joy of singing with your church.

If you have a burden to improve your congregation's singing, don't let it produce a critical spirit. That will make it all the harder for you to inspire your congregation to sing better. Scolding poor performance rarely improves it. Discuss with your ministry your burden and your vision for improving your congregation's singing. Choose most of your songs within your congregation's ability. At the same time seek to expand their hymn world by teaching them new songs. Lead a new song frequently enough (perhaps every service for a month) for the group to learn it well. Learning a new song well is an inspiration in itself. Lead a song or children's chorus by memory at times. It can help pull the group free from preoccupation with the mechanics of music reading.

If you are struggling with certain aspects of song leading, get help from a successful leader. That takes humility. But humble men make the best song leaders. In fact, they are the only ones God can bless.

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If you find yourself a lay singer, try to encourage your leader. Follow his leading. Let him know when you appreciate his selections and when you have been blessed through his service. Reassure the young leaders in their first efforts.

WILL YOU TAKE UP THE CAUSE?

Whatever your station in life, will you sing? Will you influence others to sing? Will you discern the message and focus of what you sing, rejecting the songs of men and treasuring those of God?

If you will, Satan's threats will be vanquished . . . and we will come with singing to our eternal Zion.

My life flows on in endless song;
Above earth's lamentation,
I catch the sweet, tho' far-off hymn
That hails a new creation.
Through all the tumult and the strife,
I hear the music ringing;
It finds an echo in my soul—
How can I keep from singing?

What tho' my joys and comfort die?
The Lord my Saviour liveth;
What tho' the darkness gather round?
Songs in the night He giveth;
No storm can shake my inmost calm,
While to that refuge clinging;
Since Christ is Lord of heav'n and earth,
How can I keep from singing?

—"How Can I Keep from Singing?"
(*Star of Bethlehem*, p. 68)

Appendix A

Literal Rendering of "Shepherd of Tender Youth"

Bridle of colts untamed,
Wing of unwandering birds,
Sure helm of ships,
Shepherd of royal lambs,
Assemble Thy simple children to praise holily,
To hymn guilelessly with innocent mouths,
Christ the guide of children.

O King of Saints,
All-subduing Word of the most High Father,
Ruler of Wisdom, Support of Sorrows,
Rejoicing in eternity,
Jesus, Saviour of the human race,
Shepherd, Husbandman, Helm, Bridle,
Heavenly Wing of the all-holy flock,
Fisher of men who are saved,
Catching the chaste fishes with sweet life
From the hateful wave of the sea of vices—
Guide us, Shepherd of rational sheep;
Guide, O Holy King, Thy children safely along the foot-
steps of Christ;
O Heavenly Way, Perennial Word, Immeasurable Age,
Eternal Light, Fount of Mercy, Performer of Virtue.

Appendix A

Noble is the life of those who hymn God,
O Christ Jesus, Heavenly Milk
Of the sweet breasts of the graces of the Bride,
Pressed out of Thy wisdom.
Babes nourished with tender mouths,
Filled with the dewy spirit of the rational pap,
Let us sing together simple praises,
True hymns to Christ our King,
Holy fee for the teaching of life;
Let us sing in simplicity the Powerful Child.

O choir of peace, the Christ-begotten,
O chaste people, let us sing together the God of peace.

(*The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2:
Fathers of the Second Century, pp. 295–296,
as quoted in Albert Edward Bailey, *The Gospel in Hymns*,
pp. 283–284 [capitalization and line breaks improved])

Appendix B

Help for Singing Chants

EACH LINE IN A CHANT generally begins with a number of words sung on the same note. The lines normally end with an inflection, moving note to note. To accommodate the number of words and their accents in the inflection, sometimes one word must be sung to two notes (a slur), and at other times two words to one note.

When singing chants, do not hurry. Sing deliberately, allowing the flow of the words to establish the timing. Pause at all punctuation. There is no reason to attempt beating time.

Some chants include strokes in the lyrics to show when to change measures in the music. The single strokes (|) in the lyrics correspond to the light bars in the music and the double strokes (||) correspond to the heavy bars.

Chants sound different from metered music. You will be disappointed if you expect them to sound like our metered music and try to make them sound that way. Chants have their own peculiar beauty.

Gloria Patri
Eph. 3: 21 Anon.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, And to the Ho - ly Ghost.
As it was in the beginning,
is now, and ev - er shall be, world with - out end. A - men.

Appendix C

Instruction on Singing, for Christians

Translated from: Güldene Aepffel in silbern Schalen, published by the Swiss Anabaptists in 1702.

First Question: Is it in accord with God's Word that we sing?

Answer: Yes, for examples and commandments are found in both the Old and the New Testament (Ps. 68:4; Mt. 26:30; Eph. 5:19; Jas. 5:13).

Second Question: Who then shall sing?

Answer: All the saints of God, whose hearts and mouths are filled with praise, gratitude and prayer.

Third Question: Can the ungodly not sing a song in a way that is acceptable to God?

Answer: Oh no! For just like the prayers of the ungodly, their singing is also an abomination to the Lord; he does not like the noise of their singing (Amos 5:23).

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Fourth Question: Why are such people unable to sing properly?

Answer: They do not have the Spirit of Christ, which must give within us the right tone and song.

Fifth Question: What was the singing of the early Christians like?

Answer: One of the ancient writers says this about it: The farmer, following his plow, sings a joyful Hallelujah; the careful reaper finds enjoyment in the Psalms, and the vintner sings something from David's hymns of praise, and so on.

Sixth Question: Did they also sing together in their meetings?

Answer: Yes! For when they met, before day-break, they read something, offered prayers, and in simplicity sang hymns in praise of Christ, as the heathen writers testified of them.

Seventh Question: Did they sing at the table?

Answer: Yes! Instead of shameful laughter and idle chatter they sang hymns of praise and thanks at the table with wife and children and guests.

Instruction on Singing, for Christians

Eighth Question: What should be the state of the heart if one wants to sing?

Answer: After the heart has been crushed by the Law and been made sad with longing for God, the Holy Spirit comes and brings peace and joy to the heart, so that the mouth thus overflows in praising God.

Ninth Question: What does the psaltery, the instrument with ten strings mentioned by David, signify?

Answer: Since ten is a perfect number—for when a person has counted to ten, he begins again with one—therefore Christ is our psaltery on ten strings, whose perfection and perfecting is always to be sung with our mouths and in our hearts.

Tenth Question: Who teaches us to sing correctly?

Answer: The Holy Spirit, as the true song-master, can turn the heart into a heavenly harp and instrument of God, even without external instrument or sound, and often without an audible voice.

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Eleventh Question: Is it not sufficient for a beautiful melody simply to be heard?

Answer: Oh no! Paul says, sing to the Lord in or with your hearts. Even the lips of the ungodly are able to produce a lovely voice.

Sing a song to the Lord, O saints,
Sing a song to the Lord
With the heavenly choirs
Of the Jerusalem above and below;
Let everything that breathes praise the Lord.

Elizabeth Bender and Leonard Gross,
trans. *Golden Apples in Silver Bowls*, pp. 289–290.

Appendix D

The Use of Psallo and Psalms in the New Testament

DOES THE USE OF THESE words in the New Testament command or imply that the Christian use musical instruments? We do not approach this study from a legalistic vantage point by asking, What does the New Testament allow? Rather, from a spiritual vantage point, we ask, What does the New Testament ask us to do?



The Greek word *psallo* is used five times in the New Testament. According to the *Strong's Greek Dictionary of the New Testament* this verb means to “twitch or twang, i.e. to play on a stringed instrument (*celebrate the divine worship with music and accompanying odes*).” By considering this word in its New Testament, context, we can conclude whether it commands or implies that Christians should use musical instruments.

First occurrence—Romans 15:9: “And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing [*psallo*] unto thy name.” The part of the verse in which *psallo* is found is quoted from Psalm 18:49—the words of David praising the Lord for His deliverance. This use of *psallo* describes an Old Testament happening in the life of David. It is not a directive for the church of today. Consider, however,

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the Hebrew word that was translated *psallo* in this passage. The *Strong's Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary* defines it “sing,” and the King James Version renders it “sing,” in Psalm 18:49. This indicates that *psallo* was not understood as narrowly as the *Strong's Greek Dictionary of the New Testament* seems to define it. It was broad enough to include vocal singing.

Second and third occurrences—1 Corinthians 14:15: “I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing [*psallo*] with the spirit, and I will sing [*psallo*] with the understanding also.” Again, not a command but a personal testimony. This, however, is the testimony of Paul—a New Testament Christian. Does the context give any indication whether Paul was speaking of playing an instrument or singing with his voice? The context strongly implies vocal singing.

Fourth occurrence—Ephesians 5:18, 19: “Be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody [*psallo*] in your heart to the Lord.” Here *psallo* does not refer to vocal music or to instrumental music, but to something that takes place in the heart. This passage commands that our singing touch the strings of our heart. This is the most specific New Testament expression on *how* and *where* Christians should *psallo*.

Fifth occurrence—James 5:13: “Is any merry? let him sing psalms [*psallo*].” Here the context does not offer conclusive evidence regarding what is meant by *psallo*. It could mean either vocal singing or instrumental music.

The Use of Psallo and Psalmos in the New Testament



Let's summarize our observations about the use of psallo in the New Testament. Romans 15:9 speaks of what David did in the Old Testament. In 1 Corinthians 14:15, Paul says that he will psallo with the spirit and understanding, which seems to imply that he would sing with his voice. Ephesians 5:19 commands us to psallo in our hearts to the Lord. James 5:13 simply says we should psallo when merry.

Although the word *psallo* itself can indicate the use of instruments, where context indicates what the word means, it points away from the use of instruments. The most specific direction of how to *psallo* says we should do it in our hearts. This corresponds with Jesus' teaching to worship in spirit and truth.

Psalmos is used seven times in the Greek New Testament. The *Strong's Greek Dictionary of the New Testament* defines it as "a set piece of *music*, i.e. a sacred *ode* (accompanied with the voice, harp or other instrument; a 'psalm'); collect. The book of the *Psalms*."

First occurrence—*Luke 20:42*: "And David himself saith in the book of Psalms [*psalmos*]." This clearly means the Book of Psalms in the Old Testament.

Second occurrence—*Luke 24:44*: "[Jesus] said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms [*psalmos*], concerning me." This refers to the text of the Book of Psalms.

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Third occurrence—Acts 1:20: “For it is written in the book of Psalms [*psalmos*], Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take.” Again, this refers to the Book of Psalms.

Fourth occurrence—Acts 13:33: “It is also written in the second psalm [*psalmos*], Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.” This obviously refers to the Book of Psalms.

Fifth occurrence—1 Corinthians 14:26: “How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm [*psalmos*], hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.” Here the context does not specify that *psalmos* refers to the Book of Psalms. Neither does the context rule out the use of instrumental accompaniment. It is not used in a direct command, but in a comment on what was happening in the church in Corinth. The broader passage emphasizes that what is shared collectively be understood and be edifying.

Sixth occurrence—Ephesians 5:18, 19: “Be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms [*psalmos*] and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” The context emphasizes the speaking (edification) aspect of the *psalmos*. In explaining further how they should be used, it says that we should sing, understandably with the voice, and make melody (*psallo*) in our hearts.

Seventh occurrence—Colossians 3:16: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms [*psalmos*] and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the

The Use of Psalms and Psalms in the New Testament

Lord.” The context states that the purpose for using *psalms* is to teach and admonish. Although this does not rule out the use of musical instruments, it does focus the *psalms* toward the understanding, instead of the emotions, of believers. It further explains that the *psalms* be shared through singing.

Four of the seven occurrences of *psalms* in the New Testament refer specifically to the Book of Psalms; the other three could refer to the same. One usage referred to what was happening in the church in Corinth. The two direct commands that employ *psalms* say to use them to speak (Ephesians 5:19) or to teach and admonish (Colossians 3:16). The context of both commands says to share the *psalms* by singing.

The use of *psalms* and *psalms* in the New Testament neither commands nor implies that Jesus wants His followers to use instruments.

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