

## Church Music Conflicts

Traditional Service or Contemporary Service? Cowboy Church or High Church? Many Christians may think that the recent so-called “Worship Wars” began only about 50 years ago as a result of “more modern” music genres and relaxed attire in congregants. Music, however, has been and continues to be one of the most controversial issues in the body of Christ – the Church.

Is the “old way of doing it” better, or should we “go with the times”? Each generation seems to have some who break away from how it “used to be done”. These changes are bound to cause conflict. Let’s look at the progression of church music starting from the era of the “early church”. In the **200**’s, instrumental music was banned. In the **300**’s, Ambrose introduced hymns, some of which had music written by heretics. In the **500**’s, congregations sang psalms responsively. In the **600**’s monasteries practiced a seven-times-daily order of prayer. In the **800**’s, almost all music was chanted. In the **900**’s, music was sung using pages of written music. In the **1100**’s, opponents opined that worship should sound different than “schoolyard ditties”.

Not until the **1200**’s did musicians begin to explore the idea of harmony. One critic said that harmony tarnished worship by introducing “lewdness” into the church. In the **1300**’s, worship in the great Gothic cathedrals had choirs behind screens. In the **1400**’s, music became increasingly complex. Wycliffe complained, “No one can hear the words and all the others are dumb and watch them like fools.” In the **1500**’s, King Henry VIII decreed that all services would be in English with hymns having only one syllable to each note. In the **1600**’s, the organs played by Lutherans, Anglicans, and Catholics were opposed by Reformers. Martin Luther stressed congregational singing which had fallen out of practice as a result of using choirs. In the **1700**’s, Watts boosted the idea of singing “man-made” hymns of paraphrased Scripture. Charles Wesley versified Christian doctrine and experience. In the **1800**’s, William Booth’s use of melodies with martial tempo set the tone for his Salvation Army. In the **1900**’s, Charles Fuller featured gospel music along with evangelism. In the **1970**’s, Larry Norman introduced a “familiarity” that began to erode the reverence church music had always maintained. And so the controversies continue today with many conservatives saying Christian Rock is an oxymoron —that the music of the world should not invade the church. This is the controversy of CCM, Contemporary Christian Music.

Does CCM glorify God and bring people to Christ? Is the music so loud that the words are unintelligible? Do the tempo and rhythm of the music stir up other-than- Godly passions? Are there guidelines in Scripture to help us learn what type of music glorifies God? Are there musical principles which should be observed in determining church music? Another question to consider - Is God musical? Frank Garlock thinks so. Dr. Garlock has been teaching God’s principles of music over four decades. Garlock says, “Whenever God says something, it is important. But when He says it three times, it is extremely important! Exodus 15:2, Psalm

118:14 and Isaiah 12:2 all repeat “The Lord is my strength and my **song**; He has become my salvation.” Garlock tells us the word for “song” actually refers to instrumental music, as to “strike or pluck with the fingers”. So God is our song and He also sings!

So if we see that music is part of the very *being* or nature of God, it would seem to matter to Him what kind of music we use in our worship. Ephesians 5:10 indicates that we should prove or test what is acceptable to the Lord. CCM proponents have the idea that music is amoral or neutral and say that there is no good or bad music. And who’s to say who’s right or who’s wrong? (How about God??) A letter to USA Today stated: “Music has the ability to lift, worship and energize. Yet it has in equal measure the power to destroy...there *is* such a thing as bad church music.” William Schafer says: “There is no separation of form and content in rock music... [It is] fused as a continuous experience.” In many cases, the music takes over and obliterates the message. William Kilpatrick wrote in ***Why Johnny Can’t Tell Right from Wrong***, “Rock can’t be made respectable. The music will simply subvert the words....no matter how many reforms are attempted, rock and rap will always gravitate in the direction of violence and uncommitted sex. The beat says ‘do what you want to do’”.

The distinction between the world and the church is blurred and one reason is Contemporary Christian Music, according to Dr. Garlock. Some statements of proponents of CCM underscore how far it’s gone: “It’s time to wreak havoc and praise God”; “....gangsta-style rhymes about the Lord”; “Christian fans can now groove to music that’s actually hip”. A lead singer of a CCM group said “I think rebellion and Christianity go together.” Another CCM proponent said “Lyrics are important but they don’t have to matter. You know exactly what he means even if you don’t know what he’s saying. His intent is in his inflection.” Speaking of inflection, some Christian vocalists evoke sensual thoughts by singing in a breathy manner. Steve Camp states: CCM “yodels of a Christless, watered-down....God-as-my-girlfriend kind of thing.”

So, how do we prove what is acceptable and pleasing to the Lord in our church music? Let’s look at three scriptures.

First Corinthians 14:15b – “I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind.”

Ephesians 5:19 – “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.”

Colossians 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

These teach that church music should have a discernible melody and a clear spiritual message. We can do this by singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Hymns are songs addressing

praise to God and extolling His greatness. The exact meaning of “spiritual songs” is unclear but many consider them to be songs of testimony based on our own spiritual experiences. In other words, hymns praise Him, and spiritual songs are more person-centered. USA Today commented that “singing songs of the present may express deep, intimate emotions, but singing songs of the past ties the modern church to Christians across continents, across centuries.” A CCM musician commented about older hymns: “What’s great about the older hymns is they are very theologically sound. They take deep theological topics that are central to the whole basis of truth. **Probably at that time that was great because people needed to sing the truth.**” (Wow – what insight. But don’t we still need to sing the truth??)

Dr. Garlock suggests that just as Christians are comprised of spirit, mind (soul) and body, so the elements of church music should complement those areas —in that order. Music is composed of three major aspects: Melody, harmony and rhythm. **Melody** as its primary component, presenting a clear, discernible message. **Harmony** adds fullness and pleasantness of sound, and rhythm adds accent and regulates tempo. Rhythm, however, should not predominate or obscure the melody and harmony. *Rheo* (Greek) means to flow or pulse. If there is no pulse in the music, the music is dead. In rock music, however, the rhythm of drums and electric guitars at high volume overpowers other musical elements.

Our church music – melody, harmony, and rhythm – should glorify God. Does each aspect of the music blend in such a way that the message is clear? Let’s keep in mind the second stanza of the 19<sup>th</sup> century hymn “Jesus Calls Us.” “Jesus calls us from the worship of the vain world’s golden store, From each idol that would keep us, Saying, ‘Christian, love Me more’.

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