

Revivals And Church History :: CONTROVERSY! - HISTORY of CHRISTIAN MUSIC

CONTROVERSY! - HISTORY of CHRISTIAN MUSIC - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2005/12/16 15:10

CONTROVERSY! - HISTORY of CHRISTIAN MUSIC

by "pastorbob"

Many see this as a new problem to the church and blame it on the worldliness of the 'young' people or the fact that the 'old' people are totally out of touch with reality. The debate on just how contemporary music should be in the church is an age old one which keeps recurring. The problem is that we have not learned from our past. Santayana once said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (Miller, 119). This, I believe, is the foundation of our current contemporary Christian music debate in our churches.

It is the intent of this paper to show that this is not a new problem. I will do this by surveying the history of church music and by examining the beliefs and practices of the key figures in each period.

The Medieval Period

Gregory I laid the foundation for the enlargement of the use of music in the church. He developed the Gregorian Chant which modified the scales and all voices sang in unison. All musical instruments were banned during this time and only men were allowed to sing in worship.

During the end of the 14th and 15th centuries the professionalism of church music developed to a much greater extent. Only professional choirs sang in the churches' worship services and the common folk were extremely limited in what musical participation they had. This contributed to their desire to sing religious music outside the church. During this period the development of the secular Folk Song was prominent among the commoners both Christian and pagan. So, taking their example from the 12th century troubadours men like Francis of Assisi wrote simple songs of devotion and praise and these sprang up as important parts of the religious life of the common Italian people. (McElrath, 147). Even back in the Middle Ages, there was the need for the people to sing religious songs in ways that were familiar to them. Again, this is not unlike the situation today.

The Reformation

In some senses the Reformation was not only one of theological reform but also of musical freedom. This musical reformation began with John Huss (1373-1415). He opposed all polyphonic and instrumental music and only would support the singing of devotional and simple songs in unison. He stated that unison makes all men equal in worship. (McElrath, 151) I believe Huss took a step forward in the use of popular songs for the common people, but by rejecting the use of polyphony and instrumental music he took a step backward in music's overall influence on the

church. The Bohemians, Moravians and followers of Huss put such an emphasis on popular praise in music that in 1504 a hymnbook was published for use by the common people.

Luther, however, took a position of adapting the use of popular, secular tunes with the truth of Scripture. He also believed that there was room in the church service for the use of instruments, especially the organ, polyphonic choir singing as well as congregational singing in the vernacular. (Norman,) Luther said, 'To win popularity a song must be in the most simple and common language.' (Miller, 113) Luther got his inspiration for his music from the popular German ballads of his day. The tunes were borrowed from German folk songs. (Leupold, 196) Luther was not so concerned with the associations or origins of the tunes as he was with their ability to communicate Biblical truth. (Miller, 113) Luther went as far as to say 'The devil has no need of all the good tunes for himself.' He further stated that 'For the youth's sake we must read, sing, preach, write and compose verse, and whenever it was helpful and beneficial I would let all the bells peal, all the organs thunder and everything sound that could sound'. (Miller, 114) Luther cared only to communicate biblical truth and to set hearts on fire for the Lord. Is this not the cry of those who support the use of a variety of instruments as well as musical styles in church today?

Others did not agree with Luther. Zwingli reacted against the use of any instruments that had association with the Catholic church. Calvin went even farther in his opposition to Luther's 'liberal' use of music in worship. Calvin felt that instruments were only tolerated in the Old Testament because the people of God were only infants then. He opposed the use of instruments and the singing in parts. He also eliminated any lyric not found in Scripture. He allowed only the singing of the Psalms in worship

Two strands of church music, that which is 'sacred' resulted from the reformation: Germany followed Luther in the singing of hymns and the use of instruments while England and Scotland followed Calvin's psalm only singing with out instruments. John Bunyan's attempt to introduce hymn singing into his church resulted in a split and at his death in 1691 the church finally agreed to compromise. Those who opposed to hymn singing could either sit in the vestibule or sit quietly through it until that part of the service was done. (kind of like what happens today during the choruses singing.)

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) returned from church and complained to his father that the Psalm singing was boring. His father challenged him to compose something better. And did he ever! He wrote over 750 hymns and psalms and had such an impact and influence on hymnology that he is called the 'Father of English Hymnody'. (Miller, 120-121) Watts advocated the use of hymns of human composure as opposed to Calvin's strict 'Scripture only' position.

Watts was not so readily accepted. There were those who thought he was placing his own human words above the Word of God. There were also those who felt poetry used in any sense was evil as it aroused the sensual pleasures of man and was too worldly to be used in church. Churches split, pastors were thrown out of their churches and many people were enraged over Watts hymns and their use in the church.

The funny part of all this was that even though the acceptance of Watts hymns was slow, it did happen. When hymn singing was fully embraced by the church in Europe as well as in the US, tradition set in and no other type of song should be sung in the churches but Watts hymns. It seems Santayana was correct once again.

The Wesleyan Revival

John Wesley was the spiritual father of Methodism. He preached about having a vibrant and exciting relationship with Jesus Christ. He was evangelistic and highly energetic in his preaching. His brother Charles was the musician in the family. His hymns were influenced theologically by John's arminianism and the Anglican's churches freedom of accepting new musical and worship styles.

In relation to the Psalm singing of the old Puritan tunes, the music of Charles Wesley was considered 'pop'. Wesley's music is tuneful, with dance like melodies which were often taken from improvisatory instrumental music. (McElrath, 157) Much of his music had secular origins and influences. He adopted new melodies from the popular opera and English folk melodies. (Miller, 125) Wesley had no problems mixing the secular and sacred when it came to writing songs to communicate a biblical message.

Gospel Songs of the 19th Century

The gospel songs of the 19th century had it's beginnings in the revivalist camp meetings in rural America. The camp meeting songs were characterized by phrase repetition and choruses. (Eskew, 171) The term gospel hymn or song was popularized by the Moody-Sankey revivals in 1875 in England. D.L. Moody had been called the greatest evangelist in the 19th century and he believed that singing played a vital role in evangelism. He said: "If you have singing that reaches the heart, it will fill the church every time...Music and song have not only accompanied all scriptural revivals, but are essential in deepening the spiritual life. Singing does at least as much as preaching to impress the Word of God upon people's minds. Ever since God first called me, the importance of praise expressed in song has grown upon me."

Moody realized that he needed something new as the rural camp songs would not reach the urban people he was targeting. So he found Sankey. Moody and Sankey clothed sacred songs in a style that was indistinguishable from popular tunes. They found that this enhanced the power of their ministry.

Again, not all were impressed with Moody and Sankey. The Scots were deeply entrenched in the Psalm singing of Calvin and had even rejected the wonderful hymn writing of their own Horatius Bonar. The Scots considered organ music to be of the devil. Someone once said that if Moody kept singing songs like he was doing, pretty soon he would have the people dancing. (Miller, 133) In the end, the music of Moody and Sankey was to have a incredible influence on the revival in Scotland and England.

The Salvation Army and William Booth

William Booth (1829-1912) had a burden to reach the common people of England who were not churched. He resigned his position as a Methodist minister and began to work among the poor in London. His work eventually became known as the Salvation Army. Unique to Booth's music was his use of a wide variety of instruments: violins, viola, concertives, brass instruments, drums and anything that would make a pleasant sound before the Lord.

Salvationists brought their instruments together and formed 'Hallelujah Bands' Not unlike the 'Praise Bands' today. Most of the people he wanted to reach, the unchurched, didn't know the church tunes popular at his day. So he took tunes from the local music halls. He used secular tunes and added Christian words. Booth wanted songs that were simple and in the language of the people. Songs that would stick in the minds of the people when they left his meetings. He saw thousands saved who never had ever stepped foot in a traditional church.

Again, however, not all saw these innovations as positive. Many Victorian clergymen, the press and local officials saw this type of music as offensive and distasteful. Others felt that the secular tunes would remind the people of the secular words and lead them to sin. This didn't happen and the songs caught on like wildfire. Booth made this charge to his soldiers in the band: 'Music has a divine effect upon divinely influenced and directed souls. Music is to the soul what wind is to the ship, blowing her onwards in the direction in which she is steered...Not allowed to sing that tune or this tune? Indeed! Secular music, do you say? Belongs to the devil does it? Well, if it did, I would plunder him of it, for he has no right to a single note of the whole gamut. He's a thief!...Every note and every strain and every harmony is divine, and belongs to us...So now and for all time consecrate your voices and your instruments. Bring out your harps and organs and flutes and violins and pianos and drums and everything else than can make melody! Offer them to God and use them to make all hearts about you merry before the Lord.' (Miller, 136-137)

Contemporary Society

The late 1960's saw the beginning of the Jesus Movement in the US. This movement saw the antiestablishment of the culture seeping into the church. With this came the need for a new music style was free from the tradition of the established church. Music that was more experiential and subjective and that was concerned with expressing how the individual felt in his relationship with God was what was being sung during this time. Most in the tradition church thought it a fad but they were mistaken.

It has not only lasted but that grown and matured to the contemporary Christian music we have today. And the traditional church is still fighting against it. Some see it as a fresh moving of the Holy Spirit while others see contemporary Christian music as a blatant compromise with the world. Not unlike what we have experienced throughout the history of the church.

Those in favor and support of this movement see churches utilizing this musical format as the fastest growing segment of the church today. They see innovative pastors utilize contemporary Christian

music in their worship services, youth services and evangelistic outreaches all with great success. In fact, even Billy Graham has utilized Christian pop singers in his crusades.

Opponents say that what appears good on the surface is a thinly veiled disguise of Satan trying to weaken the structure of the church. It shows the total lack of discernment and an embrace of all that's worldly by the church at large. They want a return to the traditional pattern of church hymnody. Personally, I would like to ask them which traditional pattern of hymnody are they talking about, but that is another matter.

Re: CONTROVERSY! - HISTORY of CHRISTIAN MUSIC - posted by moreofHim (), on: 2005/12/16 16:48

I love what Booth has to say here:

Quote:

-----Not allowed to sing that tune or this tune? Indeed! Secular music, do you say? Belongs to the devil does it? Well, if it did, I would plunder him of it, for he has no right to a single note of the whole gamut. He's a thief!...Every note and every strain and every harmony is divine, and belongs to us...So now and for all time consecrate your voices and your instruments. Bring out your harps and organs and flutes and violins and pianos and drums and everything else than can make melody! Offer them to God and use them to make all hearts about you merry before the Lord.'

In Him, Chanin

Re: - posted by Bomar, on: 2005/12/16 20:25

I personally have had a great desire to put some of the old, Biblically rich hymns that I love - so many of them - to a more modern tune, so they could be revived.

The problem that I have with much of modern music is not the tunes these issues:

1. The words: Often times, I am wondering which God they are singing about? There are so few references to Jesus, and so few references to anything other than a generic, all inclusive spirituality. The songs of Wesley, and Sankey, and all of the others may have had secular tunes, but they were rich in both the knowledge of the Word and in experience with Jesus. Much of the music today sounds like repetitive poetry - things that a non-Christian could easily sing to His God right alongside a believer. Our songs should be used to imprint the Word on our heart, and remind us of the Gospel, of Jesus, the Word, etc....many of today's new songs sound like "I love you, you love me..."

2. Most of what is happening today, in mega churches, is the use of amplifiers and lights to manipulate the flesh and soul. But most times when I go to my local mega church, I have to sit down because of uncontrollable grief and tears - which are not contrived of my self. It is soulish - "and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play".

I say this without any apology - last week, my local mega church started off its worship by singing the song "God" by Tori Amos - you remember,

"What if God was one of us, just a slob like one of us, just a stranger on the bus, trying to make his way home....nobody calling on the phone....except for the pope maybe in Rome".

What a blasphemous notion to even utter among saints (if they truly are)? Where is God hallowed? Where is our fear of Him? However, many were singing right along.

Anyay, I could go on forever. The article is true, as long as it is embraced by people who exalt the Word, fear God, and

know Christ.

Otherwise, the same truths can be used by the compromising to justify their means by quoting a small section of church history, and neglecting the far weightier matters that were both the fuel and the fire of those moves they say they are mimicking.

I have been extremely blessed lately by the "Christ our Life" music that was uploaded.

Re: - posted by roadsign (), on: 2005/12/16 21:39

Whenever something is done over and over again, the conscience thinks it is right. And if it is done over and over again in church, the conscience thinks that it is GOD'S WAY, and any other way must be wrong. So people squabble because they really believe that they are right, and they are defending God's music.

I just finished listening to a sermon by John Bevere about idols in our lives. His words would be appropriate for music related issues. Music becomes an idol when it holds our affections more than God does, when we can't get along without it, when we are overly dependant on it, or when it is our path to God.

The Bible tells us that dissention is caused by wrong desires. Music of any kind can become a sinful desire. And it does n't matter how much one justifies it - even if Billy Graham used it, or even if it did great things in past revivals.

The secular music production industry is making millions off of our fleshly idolatrous Christian music dependencies. Meanwhile, the poor and needy get put on the back burner, and sin remains buried while God's people are having the time of their life "worshipping" God with their music.

.... oh dear, I'm starting to sound like Ravenhill.
Diane

Re: When our music is our idol - posted by roadsign (), on: 2005/12/17 9:15

Quote:

-----sin remains buried while God's people are having the time of their life "worshipping" God with their music.

This should have read: "worshipping their music" , or "worshipping their worship."

Actually, this could be said of any aspect of religious ritual - whether ancient or modern.

The golden calf was merely a blob of gold, but in the hearts of the people it was much more than that. It was in their minds where they had forged God into their own image - an image they had absorbed in Egypt. And likewise for us, it is in our minds where anything and anyone can become an idol.

I believe that many who have been caught up in controversies over music never looked deeply enough into the real issues of the heart. They did not put the dividing lines in the right place. The sharp two-edged sword of the word of God was never applied correctly. And nothing has changed even today.

It is not the music that is the real issue with God, but what is in the heart. Here are some diagnostic questions we could ask ourselves to test if our music has become an idol for us:

1. Do I need a certain kind of music to make me FEEL like I am worshipping God?
2. Can I get along WITHOUT it?
3. Do I believe that the kind of music that I like must be what God likes too (making God into my own image)?
4. Am I so wrapped up in my music that I fail to empathize with others around them - ie I have no clue what is going on in their lives, and I really don't care?
5. Do I regard my musical involvement as my sacrifice to God, when really it is merely a way to satisfy my senses?

6. Do I control others in order to get what I want, and fail to appreciate or involve those who may have different musical abilities or interests?
7. Is what's happening on the platform at my church sacred to me (ie more importance than God)?
8. If God calls you to surrender it, would you?

There are many more questions we could ask. Maybe you have some.

Idolatry is a serious problem - a violation of the first two commandments in the OT and the greatest commandment in the NT. We are all prone to it, so, it is worth allowing God to examine our hearts regarding our music. ("worship")

Diane

Re: - posted by PreachParsly (), on: 2005/12/17 11:11

To me, its not always the music but the words. Personally there is some music I do not like. Most of what grieves me about much of the modern music is the shallowness of it. Sometimes you have to even search for biblical truth! That's absurd to think that in a "Christian" song you have to search for "Christian" trues.

I like the older songs/hymns mainly because of the depth of them. So many of them are practically sermons!

Re: - posted by GodsPeace (), on: 2005/12/17 13:16

Hi,

As a musician and a follower of Jesus, I have issues abounding regarding music in worship, teaching, evangelizing, et al . I may post at greater length on this in the future. I just wanted to say this, regarding my experience last week, in case anyone wants to comment;

I was at a full-gospel church in Bangkok last Sunday and they played "Jingle Bell Rock"... twice.

Re: How would you handle conflict regarding music? - posted by roadsign (), on: 2005/12/19 7:57

PreachParsly said:

Quote:

-----I like the older songs/hymns mainly because of the depth of them. So many of them are practically sermons!

GodsPeace said:

Quote:

-----I have issues abounding regarding music in worship,

I have some questions for you two, or for anyone that matter:

If there was controversy in your church regarding music, how would you (if the pastor) handle it?

Would your strategies promote Christian maturity?

How?

Diane

Re: CONTROVERSY! - HISTORY of CHRISTIAN MUSIC - posted by Eliel (), on: 2005/12/20 20:38

Controversy indeed!

I am a bit both ways here. I think that using contemporary music to glorify God is awesome, and not a practice to be stopped. I have come to like Hymns in the last few years and respect them, but I feel that to reach out to this generation, we need to be using such songs. Also, I enjoy guitar riffs and bass lines that shake the floor.

However, recently I have become dissatisfied with the majority of Christian music that is popular at this time. I feel that a lot of it is very shallow.

Personally, I feel that there are enough "love songs" in modern Christian music, and not enough that probe deep into the character of God, and bring the singer to an acute realisation of the character of God through the lyrics.

Songs that draw heavily from scriptures, and that speak not only of God's love and mercy, but also speak of His holiness, His justice, His righteousness, more than just the passing references given to them now.

Songs that show more than a 1-D or 2-D picture of God and who He is.

Re: - posted by JesusIsLife, on: 2005/12/20 21:09

That is what I love about God so much, the fact that it does not matter how you worship or where you worship or what "tunes" stir worship in your heart, if you are truly seeking, you're going to see Him. God will never leave Himself w/out a testimony of Himself to the person that is seeking Him with all of their heart. I really believe that the style or genre of the music is irrelevant, but that it is the person behind the music, what they stand for, and if the Holy Spirit is authoring the work. Rap, rock, country, jazz, pop, Hip-Hop, acoustic, worship music...all can be used mightily to glorify the Lord and bring Him honor, no doubt. "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them because they are spiritually discerned." 1 Corinthians 2:14

Re: CONTROVERSY! - HISTORY of CHRISTIAN MUSIC - posted by Wildhorse (), on: 2005/12/21 0:28

Wow.

Our Church uses songs for worship, which is great in a lot of ways however, we also do know that music isn't the only way to worship. We had a guest speaker come in the other week who was telling us that any way that we honor God, is a method of worship.

We sometimes use coloured lights to add flavor while we have people up the front leading us in song but the stage is not flooded with lights.

I do agree with some of our songs, some can be lacking a message, there are some songs that are non-biblical.

I have personally found a message that I feel is Christian oriented in a U2 song.

All Because of You:
I was born a child of grace

- By the grace of God I was born (I nearly died when I was born)

Nothing else about the place
Everything was ugly but your beautiful face

- Now that I know of Human sin, everything is ugly compared to God.

And it left me no illusions
I saw you in the curve of the moon
In the shadow cast across my room

- Creation of God, he made the moon, he made light.

You heard me in my tune
When I just heard confusion

- God understands me even if others don't... Until I knew God, Christianity and life in general would seem confusing.

All because of you
All because of you
All because of you
I am, I am

- God is also known as "I AM. For in the Bible he said "I am, who I say I am".

I like the sound of my own voice
I didn't give anyone else a choice

- Before I became a Christian, I didn't let God into my life. I never gave him a chance.

An intellectual tortoise
Racing with your bullet train

- Trying to keep up with the pace of life

Some people get squashed crossing the tracks
Some people got high rises on their backs

- Set of cool lyrics... Some people are too proud to seek God, 'have high rises on their backs'.

Iâ'm not broke but you can see the cracks
You can make me perfect again

- We aren't perfect but when you are a reborn Christian you are made clean by Jesus Christ.

All because of you
All because of you
All because of you
I am, I am

I'm alive
I'm being born
I just arrived
I'm at the door
Of the place I started out from
And I want back inside

- I've been reborn but I also see that as Christians maybe doubting their Christianity.

All because of you
All because of you
All because of you
I am

However this isn't a song we sing at church nor would I substitute it for worship. My point being sometimes i see a song I like that have more meaning than some worship ones in churches.

There is an artist i like called Matt Redman, he said his church did a way with music for a good month or two and found other ways of expresing worship. That is something that I reckon would be great for some churches to try.

Michael

Re: - posted by roadsign (), on: 2005/12/26 14:02

I find it interesting that whenever church music is discussed, a lot of personal feelings are expressed.

Now, I don't want to be a nag here, but in view of the constant strife over church music not only historically (as indicated in the original post) but presently, I think it would be good to consider some solutions.

Why does this strife happen? And how would you deal with it if it came up in your church? Would it be right for you to sacrifice the kind of music YOU like, and let the others have what they want? Should you leave, or should you insist on half-and-half - if, that is, there are two opinions?

How do music issues relate to spiritual issues of the heart? How important is church music to God, or to our ability to access God?

Use the Bible, (rather than subjective opinions) to support your thoughts.

Diane

Re: study the lyrics separately - posted by roadsign (), on: 2005/12/26 19:40

Quote:
-----not enough that probe deep into the character of God, and bring the singer to an acute realisation of the character of God through the lyrics.

There are plenty of songs that can do this, but I don't think that many people use songs to teach them about God as much as to experience something positive - spiritual/emotional/ nostalgic.

As a minister of music, I'm often examining text in order to influence my selections. By doing that, I find myself discovering messages that I never realized were there, even after singing them for years.

I suspect that it would be very beneficial for us to privately read the words, and meditate on them in order to notice the message. Then singing the song would be more meaningful.
And if the words don't say much, then just enjoy singing them - it's good for our circulation and the lungs, and countenance, and over-all wellbeing. It's fun! And, we sure need that too, don't we?
Diane

Re: - posted by suzy (), on: 2005/12/27 12:29

Interesting reading. I think God is big enough to cope with all types of music (especially the ones we don't like!) I can usually go along with most types of music. My only contention with the modern music band is that so often they are SO LOUD I can't even hear my own voice, let alone my neighbour's, or even to feel that I am singing to God with others.

Quote:
-----and if the words don't say much, then just enjoy singing them - it's good for our circulation and lungs and countenance and over-all wellbeing.

I am afraid I disagree! There are many modern songs that I have been subjected to over the years which are disasters - I hate singing songs which are badly written, wrongly spelt and poorly constructed grammatically, as well as not being Biblical; it is an insult to God! I refuse to sing them. I feel that I don't have time to waste singing rubbish and untruths, and I would prefer to meditate or pray.

We should be singing praises to God thanking him for who He is and what He's done, His attributes and verses from the Bible amongst many things. Too many are introspective - we should not be singing about 'me', 'my feelings' and 'my' wh

atever it is I plan to do for God one day .

I also think it is a shame that many children's songs are so superficial. It is a wonderful opportunity to get God's truth into children's hearts.

Sue

Re: what to do about bad-quality music. - posted by roadsign (), on: 2005/12/27 16:45

Sue, I actually agree with everything that you have said, and I too have had my fill of poorly written songs, poorly performed songs, trite lyrics (yes, for children too) I have also experienced the reality of proud musicians - those who are "above reproof". They cannot admit that their music needs improving, and they need to learn to be sensitive to those whom they minister to. They believe that they are (just) doing it for God, and there is no such thing as good or bad quality in music (just in house trim, car tires etc)

I suspect that music troubles in church closely parallel spiritual troubles.

The solution has been for me to simply set a good example, always be a learner, listen to the people, and love them. And I have learned that you can't change some people, if they aren't open to learning.

To some extent you simply have to accept it and make the best of it. I once did some aerobics during the "praise and worship" time. Who says some movements "receive the Spirit" better than others? I also once walked out of a service in order to protect my ears from damage. Once I saw a bag of cotton balls get passed around (ear plugs).

However, I'm also convinced that there is a time to leave a church - if God leads that way. (that happened to me) I do not believe that he desires that his people subject themselves forever to poor quality, manipulative music, preaching, etc just for the sake of "loyalty".

Diane