

The Worldview Of Rock Music

Endtime Issues No. 33

15 December 1999

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

You may be surprised to receive with this newsletter the first draft of chapter 2 of my new book on *The Christian and Rock Music*. The title of this chapter, as indicated above, is "The Worldview of Rock Music." The countless number of messages of encouragement I received from all over world to write a book on "Christian" rock music, has convinced me to give foremost priority to this project.

Frankly, I was not aware of the extent of the problem. I thought that the use of rock music in church services was relegated to few isolated places, mostly "down under." The messages you have emailed to me from Europe, South Africa, Far East, and across the USA, have made me forcefully aware of the fact, that the infiltration of rock music in our school, youth rallies, and church services, is becoming a worldwide problem. The problem is present even in our SDA literature, as this chapter indicates.

The realization of the widespread use of rock music has impressed upon me the urgent need to undertake a research designed to help our SDA fellow believers and Christian of all faiths, to understand the threat that rock music poses to the Christian faith and moral values. The research focuses NOT on Contemporary Christian Music in general, some of which is acceptable for worship, but specifically on the rock music which is driven by heavy repetitive beat, loud sound, and questionable, if not altogether sacrilegious, lyrics.

Providentially the Lord has impressed six music professors to contribute chapters to this symposium. One of them is a non-SDA renowned authority in the field of church music, who has published two classic books on this field and teaches church music at an Evangelical seminary. At this time I will not mention any name, because I want to be sure that these people will fulfill their assignment and submit their essay by January 30, 2000, or soon afterward.

The chapter you are about to read represents for me a month of dedicated research during which I spent an average of 15 hours a day reading about 50 books and two doctoral dissertation. I view this chapter as a crucial part of the whole research, because it helps the reader understand that the controversy over the use of rock music in worship, is not cultural but theological. The worldview of rock music is antithetical and inimical to the Christian faith and threaten its survival.

The numerous studies I have read, most of them by sociologists who have no theological axe to grind, have alerted me to the fact that rock music is not merely a music genre, but a revolutionary humanistic religion which poses an insidious and subtle threat to the Christian faith by shifting the focus of faith from God to self and by undermining the Christian claim to divine revelation. The use of rock music in worship is dangerous because it turns the church service into a make-believe fantasy-world in which self-satisfaction is more important than the adoration of a Holy God.

May I ask a personal favor to those of you who will take time to read thoughtfully this chapter? Would you be willing to share with me your constructive criticism? Rest assured that I will give serious consideration to any sensible comment. This is only the first draft which will be corrected in the light of your comments.

During the coming weeks I plan to email you the subsequent chapters I am working on. I consider it a privilege to share with you what I am learning. Your

constructive criticism will be gratefully received. Please pray for me that God may give me the wisdom to understand the issues and the grace to write about them in a way that will bring conviction to the heart of many sincere people.

CHAPTER II: THE WORLDVIEW OF ROCK MUSIC

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Rock music is the most popular cultural phenomenon of the second half of the twentieth century and the single greatest propagator of the moral, social, and religious values of our society. Social analysts concur that rock music has become a primary force in shaping the thinking and life-style of this generation.

In his book *Rock Music*, sociologist William Schafer describes rock music "as one of the principal dialect in the language of culture. . . . A strong counter culture has built itself around a musical sensibility, with music as a basic mode of communication and esthetic expression."¹ Schafer is not opposed to rock music. He simply acknowledges that rock has become a "tool for altering consciousness."²

It is unquestionable that rock, in its various styles, is the most popular form of music influencing the world today. People listen to rock not only in the privacy of their cars or homes, but in the work place, the shopping mall, bars, clubs, health clubs, recreational places, and in an increasing number of churches.

In the fifty years since its emergence, rock music has come to dominate the musical taste of many people in various parts of the world. In 1976, two social scientists at Temple University wanted to investigate the physical and emotional impact of rock music on students. They easily found 56 rock enthusiasts for their study, but when they tried to form a control group, "a significant sample could not be found that disliked hard rock music."³

The Revolutionary Nature of Rock. In his essay "Rock and Roll, Religion and the Deconstruction of American Values," sociologist Charles Pressler notes that "rock and roll music and its messages ushered in a new view of the world and a new mode of interpersonal relationships—and by nearly any definition, the social effects of rock music can be described as 'revolutionary.'"⁴ The revolution started by rock music has some distinct religious connotations that will be examined in this study. In his book *You Say You Want a Revolution*, sociologist Robert Pielke argues compellingly that the rock revolution which began in the 1950s has created a religious transformation of the American culture.⁵ Our concern is to ascertain if the nature of this religious transformation is a bane or blessing for the Christian faith.

The revolutionary nature of rock music is succinctly described by sociologist William Schafer: "Rock has acted as a catalyst, a force uniting and amplifying ideas and feelings. It is a medium, a means of communicating emotions . . . the medium is the message. Associated with rock, for instance, is a cult of irrationality, a reverence for the instinctual, the visceral—and a distrust of reason and logic; this form of anti-intellectualism can be highly dangerous, can lead to totalitarian modes of thought and action. Linked with this anti-intellectualism is an interest in the occult: magic, superstition, exotic religious thought, anything contrary to the main current of Western thought. Also directly connected is an obsession with the unconscious mind; the force of drug culture has been its promise to reveal the hidden, instinctual man, to free the individual from restrictions and limitations of his conscious mind and his gross physical body."⁵

More will be said during the course of our study on the philosophical presuppositions of rock music. At this point it suffices to note that the conflict of values stirred up by the message of rock music, has pitted the youth of the rock generation against their rocking elders. The conflict has extended to many Christian churches where sanitized forms of rock music have been adopted. In fact, the introduction of "Christian" rock music during church services, has become one of the most emotive and divisive issues that is splitting congregations in different denominations, including my own Seventh-day Adventist Church.

When used to designate rock music, the term "Christian" will be consistently placed between quotation marks, because this research indicates that rock music, as defined in chapter 1, is antithetical to Christian beliefs and values.

Some Christians consider "Christian" Rock music as an outrageous worldly compromise, while others as a providential agent of renewal and evangelistic outreach. Unfortunately much of the discussion about the pro and con of "Christian" rock music, has been superficial, especially among those who believe that Christians should reject the "secular" version of rock music, but accept the "Christian" version. Usually the discussion centers primarily on the rhythm, the lyrics, the physiological and psychological impact of rock music, the graphics of the music's packaging, and the life-styles of the artists. These are important factors which will be considered in the next chapters, but, in my view, what is even more important is an understanding of the philosophical and theological presuppositions espoused by rock music.

Human activities are shaped by the presuppositions of individual and nations. Taken together these presuppositions form what we call a worldview which affects everything we are and do. This means that our understanding of God and of His revelation, gives meaning to our life and shapes our activities, including the production of musical art forms. The changing styles of church music usually reflect a change in the worldview of the time, as interpreted by contemporary composers.

An evaluation of rock music, whether it be its secular or "Christian" versions, necessitates an understanding of the worldview (theological presuppositions) that gave rise to such music. What are some of the fundamental beliefs that rock music contains and proclaims, and why is the creed of such music so widely accepted by the masses today? An understanding of the worldview of rock music, provides a basis for determining whether or not rock music can be legitimately sanitized and made it into a medium to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness and to proclaim His Gospel.

For the sake of clarity, let me state at the outset the findings of this investigation. Rock music embodies and expresses a humanistic/pantheistic worldview which stems both from its African roots and the secular humanism of Western society. This worldview openly rejects God and His revealed moral principles, promoting instead hedonism, individualism, materialism, amoralism, atheism, sex, drugs, violence, the occult, and other forms of human perversion. Our study will show that by shifting the locus of faith from God to self, rock music knocks the props out of the Christian faith by making God a commodity used for personal gratification. Any attempt to sanitize and convert rock music into a medium to worship God and proclaim the Gospel, prostitutes the Christian faith and thus weakens its witness to the world today.

Objective of this Chapter. In this chapter we seek to understand the worldview of rock music by following what to some people may appear as a tortuous procedure. The reasons for this procedure will become evident by the time the reader reaches the latter part of the chapter.

The first and broader objective is to examine how the production of music in the history of Western Christian culture, has been influenced by the evolution of the understanding of God. The historical shift from the transcendental understanding of "God beyond us" during the medieval period, to the immanent conception of "God for us" during the sixteenth century reformation, and to "God within us" perception from the seventeenth-century to our times, helps us understand the gradual evolution of church music from the medieval chant, to the Lutheran chorale, to today's "Christian" rock.

The second and narrow objective is to consider some of the significant ideologies that account for the origin and worldwide popularity of rock music today. The focus of our attention will be three significant areas. First, we will look at how the modern manifestation of a strong immanent "God within us" conception, has caused people to seek an immediate emotional experience of God through the stimulus of rhythmic, loud music.

Second, we will discuss how the pantheistic/immanent orientation of the African/Indian music has influenced the worldview and style of rock music. Lastly, we will

examine how the influence of humanistic ideas have shaped much of Western thought, especially during the past two centuries. We shall see that the convergence of these developments in our time have facilitated the adoption of rock music, both in the secular and Christian world.

Two Significant Studies. Two major studies that have helped me to understand the relationship between the development of new religious music styles and the evolution of concept of God. The first study is the doctoral dissertation of Wolfgang Stefani on "The Concept of God and the Sacred Music Style, " presented at Andrews University, on October 1993. Stefani presents compelling documentation showing that "music styles are religious-value laden—they are veritable embodiments of beliefs about reality. . . . The issues surrounding sacred music style discussions extends far deeper than petty likes and dislikes. At the bottom line, the clash over sacred music styles may well be a clash of underlying beliefs about the nature of ultimate reality, not of inconsequential aesthetic preferences."⁶

In terms of our present study, Stefani's research suggests that the current debate over the use of "Christian" rock in church worship is ultimately a theological debate about our understanding of God, and not merely a controversy about music preferences. This is a most important observation that, as we shall see, provides the key to understand why the use rock music, both in its secular and "Christian" versions, is a crucial issue that affects the very theological foundation of the Christian faith. Those who argue that the use of "Christian" rock in church worship, is simply a matter of cultural or personal preferences, ignore that church music embodies and expresses our theological beliefs. Both the style and content of church music reflect our understanding of God and His revelation.

The second significant study is by Calvin M. Johansson, who is Professor of Music at Evangel College in Springfield, Missouri. He has written several books on church music, including a doctoral dissertation.⁷ In *Discipling Music Ministry. Twenty-first Century Directions*, Johansson shows how "tracing the history of Western worldviews gives us a clear picture of culture's steady drift toward human autonomy. That move, unrelenting in its press for influence and control, has deeply affected the Christian church. Evangelism, teaching, and worship, as well as daily Christian living, have all been changed, albeit subtly, by the humanistic influence to make individuals and their desire supreme. Church music has been part of that change."⁸

Johansson notes that the change in church music brought about by contemporary humanistic influences can be seen in the relentless preoccupation with pleasuring self. He finds that "a survey of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM), the most popular genre of religious music, shows many songs transparently, even heretically, oriented around the satisfaction of people. . . . but when the preoccupation is with the self . . . then worship is convoluted, reflecting culture's elevation of people over God"⁹

PART I THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF GOD AND OF SACRED MUSIC STYLES IN WESTERN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

The music used in Christian worship reflects a church understanding of God and of His revelation contained in Scripture. The problem is that there is an inherent paradox in the Biblical revelation of God. On the one hand, God is revealed as a transcendent Being, "the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy" (Is 57:15). On the other hand, God is revealed as a immanent Being, who dwells "with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit" (Is 57:15).

Paul W. Hoon perceptively explains that "Christian worship rests on a paradox, that God is both like and unlike man; He is personal, but He is more than personal. When the former aspect is exaggerated . . . God becomes a kind of divine pal, worship becomes chatty intimacy, devoid of reverence and evoking the more infantile elements in human personality. When the latter aspect is exaggerated worship loses its concreteness and reality, and tends to evaporate into vague states of mystical piety."¹⁰

This apparent contradictory transcendent/immanent view of God, has historically impacted upon Christian worship. Worship styles have swung from one extreme to another, depending from the Christian understanding of God. The lesson of history is that it is essential to maintain a balance between a transcendent and immanent view of God, in order to ensure a healthy Christian life and worship, including church music.

The swing from a predominantly transcendence-oriented, other-worldly worship and artistic expression, to an immanence-oriented, this-worldly worship and artistic style, can be traced in the history of Western Christian culture. Wolfgang Stefani offers a simple and useful categorization of this development under the following three headings: "(1) God beyond us; (2) God for us, and (3) God besides us/within us."¹¹ These three categories will serve as a basis for our historical survey which shows how each of these views of God has affected Christian life and worship during the course of Christian history.

1. The "God Beyond Us" Orientation

Early Church. The transcendental conception of "God beyond us" prevailed, though in different forms, during the first fifteen centuries of Christianity. The early Christians strongly rejected the prevailing immanent orientation of pagan religions, where the gods were present and interacted with people. This was especially of the mystery religions whose orgiastic rituals were designed to lead people into direct contact with the divinity. Music played an important role in these rituals and exerted an irresistible attraction for the masses.

Alfred Sendrey notes that the pagan mystery religions brought to Rome "a great number of foreign musicians and dancers. Their instruments and concert music gained little by little a firm foothold in the theater, and were later copiously employed in the entertainment music of the Romans."¹²

In some ways the ecstatic rites of the pagan mystery religions which intoxicated the masses, resembled to the frenzy excitement caused today by rock concerts. Christians who believed in a holy transcendent God, strongly rejected the musical extravaganza of pagan cults.¹³ As Hanoah Avenary observes: "Jingling, banging, and rattling accompanied heathen cults, and the frenzied shawms of a dozen ecstatic rites intoxicated the masses. Amid this euphoric farewell feast of a dying civilization, the voices of non-conformists were emerging from places of Jewish and early Christian worship."¹⁴

Defenders of rock music argue that in the past Christians have used secular music and artistic forms to communicate the Christian message. This argument can hardly be supported by the witness of the early Christians who refused to participate in or adopt those secular forms of entertainment which were antithetical to Christian message and moral values.

A second century document known as the *Octavius* written by Minicius Felix, contains a dialogue between a pagan, Caecilius, and a Christian, Octavius. Pagan Caecilius charges his Christian friend, Octavius, of abstention from social life, saying: "You are abstaining from respectable enjoyments. You do not visit exhibitions; you have no concern in public display; you reject the public banquets, and you abhor the sacred contests."¹⁵ Octavius acknowledges the truth of this charge and explains the motives that prompted this abstention, namely, the violence and immorality promoted by such shows were contrary to Christian values.

"For in the chariot races who does not shudder at the madness of the crowd brawling amongst itself? Or at the teaching of murder in the gladiatorial combats? In the theater also the madness is not less, but the debauchery is more prolonged: for now a mimic either expounds or shows forth adulteries; now a nerveless player, while he feigns lust, suggests it; the same actor disgraces your gods by attributing to them adulteries, sighs, hatred."¹⁶

The early Christians survived and became a transforming force in the Roman empire, not by sanitizing the pagan forms of entertainment in order to use them to communicate the Christian message, but by rejecting the secular, immoral shows and values promoted by the Hollywood stars of their time. They refused to attend their shows, even if this meant to be ridiculed and rejected as "misanthropists," a term often used to denote their non-conformist life-style. Imagine what would happen today in America or in any Christian country, if all professing Christians would follow the example of the early Christians by refusing to watch or participate in any form of entertainment that promotes violence or immorality! The entertainment industry would soon have to clean up their programs if they wanted to remain in business.

The Middle Ages. The imperial recognition and protection granted to Christianity in the fourth century, did not significantly change the transcendent "God beyond us" view of the Godhead. Christians adapted the artistic formulas used to extol the glory of the monarch to represent their conception of the omnipotence and transcendence of God. The development of sacerdotalism and sacramentalism, distanced even further God from the direct experience of the worshippers, whose participation in worship was minimized. In fact, the singing was done mostly by the clergy, and not by the congregation. Lay members were spectators rather than participants in the church services.

The conception of "God beyond us" was reflected in the music of the time, where, as Paul Lang points out, "the subject and aim of Christian cult music was and remained . . . the glorification of God and the edification of man."¹⁷ The focus of church music, as Wolfgang Stefani notes, "was the transcendent God, and humankind was to be taught about Him and raised to His realm. Contemplation, rather than involvement was the emphasis; idealism, not realism; instruction, not pleasure; spiritual meaning, not psycho-physiological power were the objectives. These ideals can be traces in most Christian artistic expressions over a period of a thousand years."¹⁸

The societal consciousness of God, as the transcendent and omnipotent Ruler of mankind that existed during the Middle Ages, has never been equaled. As Johansson points out, "There were no 'sacred' and 'secular' categories. Art, music, and drama had but one end—the praise of God. No cost was too much, no effort too great to bring to pass that which brought glory to the Creator. Hence, art was full of ecclesiastical symbolism. In music, triple meter had religious significance because it was thought to symbolize the three persons of the Trinity. The musical interval of an augmented fourth was avoided because its lack of consonance was thought to represent the *diabolus in musica*, the devil in music."¹⁹

For most of the Middle ages sacred music was limited to the monophony of chant, which consisted of one note sung at a time without harmony or accompaniment. Around the turn of the millennium, medieval composers introduced polyphony, that is, that is two, or three or four parts to be sung simultaneously. This was an incredible innovation.

Before polyphony, all the singing consisted of one melodic line, known as chant. There was no harmony, no chords, no pianos, no orchestras.

Those who argue that the church in the past borrowed secular melodies to compose sacred music, ignore that medieval music was very homogeneous, and there was "no distinction between the sacred and the profane until the beginning of the Baroque Era."²⁰ "The differences between plainsong, troubadour and folk styles were less important than their melodic interpenetration and their common relationship to a timeless universal deity."²¹

Though battered by barbarian invasions and influences, the medieval society remained oriented toward God and the church. People lived to serve God with their work and church. They perceived God as a transcendent Being "beyond us" and their church music reveals their concern to honor the infinite and omnipotent Ruler of the universe, rather than to seek personal enjoyment.

2. The "God For Us" Orientation

The medieval transcendental orientation of "God beyond us," was gradually replaced beginning with the sixteenth-century with an immanent conception of "God for us." The Protestant Reformation played a major role in shortening the "distance" between God and the believer. By stripping away the mediatorial role of priests and saints and by emphasizing the priesthood of all believers who have direct access to God, the Reformation helped people to see God as a "kind" Being, "for us" and close to us, more than "above us."

The medieval vision of God as an exacting, unapproachable Judge, was replaced by that of a loving God, eager to save all those who accept the reconciliation provided through the atoning sacrifice of His Son. Though God was still recognized as above and beyond us, the shift in focus was on the loving Savior whom the believers could approach directly and personally.

The Role of Luther. The new vision of the nearness and accessibility of God, encouraged the production of a music that was more expressive of everyday life. Luther played a leading role in producing music expressive of the new understanding of God and salvation, and in promoting congregational singing in the common language of the people. Contrary to Luther, Calvin and Zwingli censured the singing of lyrics not found in the Scripture, allowing only the Psalms to be sung in worship.

In the days of Martin Luther congregations were not allowed to sing in the Catholic church service. Thus, the "musical training" of most people consisted mostly of popular tunes picked up on the street. Friedrich Blume points out, "people accustomed to singing only in a secular surrounding and to remaining silent in the traditional church . . . now they had to learn how to sing in the church."²²

Luther developed a unique style of church music, known as chorale, by borrowing some familiar, singable tunes, to which he added a Christian text. Defenders of "Christian" rock argue that since Luther borrowed tunes from the barroom songs of the day and added Christian texts to them (known as *contrafacta*), we can also borrow tunes from the rock music of our day and add to them Christian lyrics.

Luther and Secular Music. This is a popular argument frequently found in pro "Christian" rock literature. For example, in his book *The Contemporary Christian Music Debate*, Steve Miller wrote: "The models for his [Luther's] lyrics were the popular ballads of his day. The tunes were borrowed from German folk songs, the music of the masses, and even a hymn to Mary. Luther was not concerned with the association or origin of the tunes as he was with their ability to communicate truth."²³

On a similar vein, Michael Tomlinson wrote in *Ministry*: "Eliminating the secular roots of Christian music would mean to say good-bye to the hymns of Martin Luther, whose music was borrowed from secular German folk tunes."²⁴ In the same issue of

Ministry (September 1996), Lillianne Doukhan, Professor of Church Music at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, wrote: "Martin Luther used melodies and rhythms familiar to the people for his chorales. Contrary to Calvin, Luther did not perceive the church as separate from society; in his philosophy, secular elements could be transformed according to a new understanding."²⁵

This argument that since Luther borrowed from the secular, popular tunes of his day, we can also borrow from the popular rock tunes of today, is misleading and inaccurate, for at least five reasons.

First, Luther used what may be called the "classical" music of his day, and not a sacrilegious type of music like most of secular rock music today. Luther did not adopt the sensual, erotic music of the day. On the contrary, he warned against the use of "erotic ranting," as being the devil's means to corrupt human nature.²⁶

The tunes adopted by Luther, writes Ulrich Leopold, "were folksy, but never vulgar. Rollicking drinking songs were available in the sixteenth century too. Luther steered clear of them. He never considered music a mere tool that could be employed regardless of its original association . . . but was careful to match text and tune, so that each text would have its proper tune and so that both would complement each other."²⁷

Second, of the thirty-seven chorales composed by Luther, only *one* tune came directly from a secular folk song. Fifteen were composed by Luther himself, thirteen came from Latin hymns or service music, two had originally been religious pilgrim's songs, four were derived from German religious folk songs, and two are of unknown origin.²⁸

These facts discredit the popular assumption that Luther borrowed the majority of his songs from secular sources. In actual fact he derived very little from secular sources. Luther's favorite composer was Josquin de Prez, who is regarded as the most competent composer of that century.²⁹

Luther Sought to Remove Worldly Connotations. Third, Luther changed the melodic and rhythmic structure of the tunes that he borrowed from secular sources, in order to eliminate any possible worldly influence. In his scholarly book, *Martin Luther, His Music, His Message*, Robert Harrell explains: "The most effective way of [negating] worldly influence would be to 'de-rhythm' the music. By avoiding dance tunes and 'de-rhythming' other songs, Luther achieved a chorale with a marked rhythm, but without the devices that would remind the people of the secular world. So successful was the work done by Luther and other Lutheran musicians that scholars were often unable to detect the secular origins of chorales. The other way in which Luther sought to remove secular associations from the mind of the congregation was through the use of Scripture and scriptural allusions in the texts. By filling his chorales with the written Word, Luther sought to direct the thoughts of his people toward the Living Word."³⁰

Harrell concludes his well-documented study, saying: "A study of Luther's chorales reveals two important facts about Luther's use of secular elements in his sacred music: (1) Although there was much popular music available to him, from drinking songs to dance tunes to religious folk songs and carols, Luther chose only those tunes which best lend themselves to sacred themes and avoided the vulgar, 'rollicking drinking songs' and dance tunes. (2) No material which Luther used for a chorale remained unchanged, except for the one case noted previously. Rather, 'he carefully tested the melodies he considered, and when necessary molded them into suitability. . . . Alteration were freely made."³¹

Fourth, it is important to note that Luther lived in the "Age of Faith," and not in the "Age of Skepticism" like ours. The culture of Luther's time was influenced by religious faith and moral values. The major universities and the fine arts were controlled or sponsored by the church. The distinction between secular and religious music was relative.

Friedrich Blume explains: "Protestantism preserved the medieval classification of the world, with secular art subjected to an intellectual discipline characterized by piety and churchliness. Under these conditions the disparity between sacred and secular music could at first hardly become a problem."³² In the light of this fact, "to say that Luther

borrowed from secular sources is to admit that he relied on, at the worst, a religion-based culture."³³

There is a world of difference between the secular culture of Luther's time and that of our times. The secular music of Luther's day was largely inspired by a religious faith, while most secular rock music today openly rejects and defies the Christian faith and moral values.

Fifth, Luther arranged the music for the young people of his time in a way to lead them away from the attraction of worldly music. This can hardly be said of "Christian" rock music today which retains the melody and rhythm of secular rock. Luther explained why he changed the musical arrangements of his songs: "These songs were arranged in four parts for no other reason than that I wanted to attract the youth (who should and must be trained in music and other fine arts) away from love songs and carnal pieces and to give them something wholesome to learn instead, so that they can enter with pleasure into what is good, as befitting to youth."³⁴

Summing up, Luther's use of secular music teaches us, not to sanitize rock music which promotes sex, drugs, violence, but to choose instead the best music of our culture and make it a fitting vehicle to communicate the Word of God. What a marvelous example we have in Martin Luther!

3. The "God Besides Us/Within Us" Orientation

The immanent concept of "God for us" promoted by the sixteenth century Reformation, progressively moved more and more toward a subjective understanding and experience of God. This development from "God besides us" to "God within us" began in the seventeenth century and has continued to our time. The immanent aspect of the immediate and intimate experience of God has been increasingly emphasized. The personal and internal experience of the divine became the hallmark of Pietism, Methodism, Evangelicalism, American revivalism, the Holiness movement, Pentecostalism. Rock music, as we shall see, follows a similar orientation in offering to its fans the means to plug in into a "supernatural" power.

Wolfgang Stefani notes two different streams among these movements—streams which have been gradually merging together in the late twentieth century. "The first category—'God besides us'—included Pietism (in its initial seventeenth- and eighteenth-century phase), Methodism, and Evangelicalism. The second category—'God within us'—included nineteenth-century American Revivalism, the Holiness Movement, and Pentecostalism. The first stream stressed daily, cooperative relationship with the Holy Spirit, while the second placed emphasis on the abandonment to the Spirit's control. While both highlighted the closeness of the Divine, the former adopted a more reasoned posture, whereas the latter favored a more unrestrained, intuitive approach."³⁵

A common characteristic of these movements was the adoption of tunes for evangelical hymnbooks derived from the music of the opera house and concert halls. Church music, became very self-oriented, emotional, sentimental, and appealing to the senses. This was especially true in the rapidly developing Charismatic movement. The goal of music was to cause people to experience an ecstatic encounter with God at the emotional level.

Self-Orientation in Music. A good example of the self-orientation in music is the "Gospel song movement of the nineteenth century," which, as Calvin Johanssen explains, "gave new meaning to the concept of religious self-interest. Songs such as 'Will There Be Any Stars in My Crown?' and 'A Sinner Like Me' were typical of the 'me-centrism' of culture's progress. Couple with melodramatic nostalgia, they joined the trend toward complete subjectivity. Gospel songs such as 'My Mother's Prayer,' ('As I wondered 'round the homestead, Many a dear familiar spot Bro't within my recollection Scenes I'd seemingly forgot'), as well as 'I am Coming, Dear Saviour,' were typical of the genre's selfish orientation."³⁶

The self-orientation characterizes today much of secular and "Christian" rock music, which speaks far more of "I" and "me," than of Christ and God. Even the recently knighted Sir Elton John, author of the popular song "Candle in the Wind," does not hesitate to sing about his solution to his boredom:

I'm getting bored
being part of mankind,
think I'll buy a forty-four
and give 'em all a sunrise.
Yea, think I'm gonna kill myself,
cause a little suicide.³⁷

What a tragic way to find a solution to boredom! Yet, this solution is hardly surprising when "self" displaces God in a person's life. The same self-orientation is present in many "Christian" rock songs, as we shall see in the next chapter. An example can be found in the words of the song "Beheaded," which is sang by the popular "Christian" band known as "Vengeance."

I want (my) head chopped off
You'll see (my) body rot
But then (I'll) reign with Christ
And then you will fry.³⁸

This outrageous "Christian" song, which ends with the screams of tortured sinners, reveals a clear direction in rock music, namely, to focus on the human dilemmas, rather than on God's provision for the salvation of every human being.

Charlie Peacock, an awarding-winning artist, songwriter, and producer of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM), in his book *At the Crossroad: An Insider's Look at the Past, Present, and Future of Contemporary Christian Music*, acknowledges that a shift from God to self that has occurred in CCM, partly due to charismatic influence. He wrote: "By emphasizing the work and gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially spontaneous revelational prophesying and speaking in tongues, the focus shifted from knowing God through His Word to knowing God through experience. This in turn shifted the focus from thinking to feeling, wherein for many believers their experience became as much the measure of truth as the sure Word of Truth. . . . For some Christians, the desire for charismatic experiences gradually eclipsed their desire to learn of God through the Bible."³⁹

Pentecostal "God Within Us" Experience. The present search for a charismatic experience through music, can be traced to the early Pentecostal music of the nineteenth century, which usually took up to two thirds of the worship service.⁴⁰ The music was characterized by hand clapping, foot stomping, and dancing in the spirit.⁴¹ "The intense singing was commonly accompanied by the strum of guitars, the rhythmic beat of tambourines and drums, and the blare of brass as new converts brought their instruments from now-forsaken dance bands into the house of worship."⁴² Repetitious choruses with tunes of secular origin, together with drama and mime, were all used to generate emotional excitement rather than intellectual comprehension.⁴³

George Pullen Jackson, a specialist on North American folk hymnody, provides a colorful eyewitness-account of how music functioned in the service of a Church of God in Cleveland, Tennessee, in 1929. The music began at the highpoint of the service, known as "the altar service." "Then the songs' function, as a rhythmic, tom-tom-like noise for inducing the desired ecstasy became apparent. For from that time on there was no let-up. The spirit moved some to dance, others to speak in the unknown tongue, to shout, to jerk, or to fall in a dead trance. Mourners in ever-increasing numbers fell on their knees, elbows in a folding chair, at the altar, while the exhorters clapped hands to the time of the music. . .

"After half an hour of this, the singing came to an end. Also the instruments strummers, worm out, dropped out one by one, leaving only the piano player and a

tambourine whacker whom I could not see, to carry on the steady, and almost terrifying rhythmic noise."⁴⁴

Indiana Adventist Campmeeting. The use of loud, rhythmic music to cause an immediate emotional "high" experience of God, was not foreign to early Adventism, as Ronald Graybill has documented.⁴⁵ An unusual manifestation of such an experience occurred at a Camp Meeting, held in Muncie, Indiana, on September 13-23, 1900. Stephen Haskell, an Adventist church leader and author, describes what he saw in a letter he wrote to Ellen White, on September 25, 1900: "It is beyond description . . . There is a great power that goes with the movement that is on foot there . . . because of the music that is brought to play in the ceremony. They have an organ, one bass viol, three fiddles, two flutes, three tambourines, three horns, and a big bass drum, and perhaps other instruments which I have not mentioned . . . When they get on a high key, you cannot hear a word from the congregation in their singing, nor hear anything, unless it be shrieks by those who are half insane. I do not think I overdraw it at all. I never saw such a confusion in my life. I have been through scenes of fanaticism, but I never saw anything like this."⁴⁶

Ella Robinson, a granddaughter of Ellen White, offers us a similar description of such religious gatherings: "They were led to seek an experience of physical demonstration. The bass drum and the tambourines aided in this. It was expected that one, possibly more, of their number would fall prostrate to the floor. He would then be carried to the platform, where a dozen or more people would gather around and shout 'Glory to God' while others prayed and sang."⁴⁷

It is noteworthy that the bedlam of noise of the Indiana Campmeeting and similar religious gatherings, was inspired by the "Holy Flesh Doctrine," which was widely accepted by the Indiana Conference workers, including its president, R. S. Donnell.⁴⁸ According to their teachings, Christians can receive an incorruptible flesh now and be alive when Jesus returned. It should be noted that loud instrumental, rhythmic music played at their religious gatherings was designed to facilitate this physical experience of the divine transforming power. In many ways the "Holy Flesh Doctrine" represents another example of the "God within us" conception of the divine that we have traced historically and of the attempt to experience God's power through loud and rhythmic music.

Ellen White took a strong stand against the "Holy Flesh Doctrine" and the music used to promote it. She wrote: "The Holy Spirit never reveals itself in such methods, in such a bedlam of noise. This is an invention of Satan to cover up his ingenious methods for making of none effect the pure, sincere, elevating, ennobling, sanctifying truth for this time. Better never have the worship of God blended with music than to use musical instruments to do the work which last January was represented to me would be brought into our campmeetings. . . . A bedlam of noise shocks the senses and perverts that which if conducted aright might be a blessing. . . . Those things which have been in the past will be in the future. Satan will make music a snare by *the way it is conducted*."⁴⁹

Ellen White's warning had its intended effect. Loud and rhythmic instrumental music was discontinued in Adventist churches. It is only in recent times that loud, syncopated rocky music has began making its appearance again at Adventist youth rallies and in an increasing number of churches. This development is not surprising, since with prophetic insight Ellen White predicted at the turn of the century that "Those things which have been in the past will be in the future. Satan will make music a snare by *the way it is conducted*."⁵⁰

From God-centered to Self-centered Music. The use of music to induce an ecstatic spiritual "high," is but a modern manifestation of a strong immanent "God within us" conception, which causes people to seek an immediate emotional experience of God through the stimulus of rhythmic, loud music. The historical evolution we have briefly traced from the transcendental understanding of "God beyond us" during the medieval period, to the immanent conception of "God for us" during the sixteenth century reformation, and to "God within us" perception from the seventeenth-century to our times,

helps us understand the gradual evolution of church music from the chant to the chorale, to today's "Christian" rock.

The popular attraction of "Christian" rock music today as a means to induce an emotional "high," must be seen as the natural outcome of the gradual evolution in the understanding of God during Christian history. The shift from a predominantly transcendent view of "God beyond us" to an unmistakably immanent conception of "God within us," has encouraged the production of music which has gradually become more self-centered and less God-centered.

The historical evolution of church music we have traced above, teaches us the importance of maintaining a correct understanding of God and His revelation. In Scripture God has revealed Himself as being both transcendent and immanent, beyond us and within us. These two dimensions of God self-revelation must be kept in their proper balance in order to ensure a healthy religious experience and church music. The next chapters will examine more closely how our theology must inform our religious experience, including the melody and rhythm of our music.

To better understand why rock music has gained such an immense popularity in our society, and in many Christian churches, we need to briefly consider two significant concomitant developments. The first is the pantheistic/immanent orientation of the African/Indian music which is the root of rock music. The second, is the influence of humanistic ideas which have shaped much of Western thought, especially during the past two centuries. Both of these developments, as we shall see, have facilitated the adoption of rock music, both in the secular and Christian world.

African/Indian Roots of Rock Music. In his penetrating analysis of rock music, published by Oxford University Press and entitled *The Triumph of Vulgarity: Rock Music in the Mirror of Romanticism*, Robert Pattison points out that rock music draws its inspiration, not from the transcendental religions of Confucianism or Islam, but from its original home in Africa and India.⁵¹ The reason is the presence in these cultures of a pantheistic/immanent conception of God, who is seen as being, not beyond, but within the individual and the natural world around. This conception is reflected especially in the structural features of the West African possession-trance type of music.

Pattison explains that the individual in these cultures "lives out a creed that swallows up history. His home is the eternal, primitive *now* from which rock traces its descent:

Hail, hail, rock 'n' roll,
Deliver me from days of old,
Long live rock 'n' roll,
The beat of the drums loud and bold,

sang black guru Church Berry in the rock classic 'School Days.' . . . Rock is drawn to primitive cultures that promises release from a history that seems to promise the death of the imagination."⁵²

The African roots of rock music explains the fact, according to Pattison, that "the Delta is the root and the Mississippi the stem for the flowering of African music in America. . . . Sam Philipps had the ideal credentials to be instigator of the rock revolution. He was born in Alabama and reared among the cotton fields. He grew up with a passion for the black music that was an integral part of the agricultural life in the Delta and for the people that made it."⁵³

"The secret of Philipps' success was not his devotion to black genius but his appreciation for the white taste. . . . He is the sources of the most famous remark ever made about rock, made before there was rock: 'If I could find a white boy who could sing like a nigger, I could make a million dollars. . . . Phillips found his white boy in Elvis Presley. Nineteen-year-old Elvis cut his first professional record for Phillips on July 6,

1954, a date that will live forever as the day on which rock began. . . . What belief in the incarnation is to a Christian, devotion to this myth of black origins is to the rocker"⁵⁴

The pantheistic/immanent focus of rock music, derived from its African roots, resembles both with this-worldly orientation of our humanistic culture, as well as "the God within us" orientation of many Christians today. The convergence of these three factors, helps us to understand why rock music, both in its secular and "Christian" version has become the most popular genre of music today. Simply stated, Afro-American, humanists, and many Christians have been attracted to rock music, because they found in it the medium that helps them to express and experience their similar pantheistic/immanent worldview. Each group experiences through rock music, though in different ways, the feeling of being plugged in to something greater than themselves.

Revival Music and Afro-American Conversions. Further support for the commonality between the African music and the "God within us" orientation of much of Christianity today, is provided by recent scholarly studies on the relationship between Christianity and the Afro-American experience. The research indicates that prior to 1740 relatively few Afro-Americans were converted to Christianity in North America.⁵⁵ The situation changed dramatically with the advent of revival movements and camp meetings in the latter half of the eighteenth century, continuing into the nineteenth century. Conversions among Afro-Americans increased markedly, especially to Methodist, Baptist, and independent denominations.

Olly Wilson maintains that a significant factor often overlooked is "that several aspects of the common forms of worship used by the Protestant revivalist movement in the United States at that time were consonant with several traditional West African practices."⁵⁶

On a similar vein Melville Herskovits argues that Afro-Americans were attracted to the revival type of Christianity because "its ritualism most resembled the type of worship known to them."⁵⁷ Some of the common characteristics included: "Loud emotional cries and groans throughout the service, worshippers leaping out of their seats, screaming, jerking, shouting, falling into convulsions, speaking in tongues, and engaging in dance; the use of music in creating an emotional atmosphere; the performance of hymns and spiritual songs in call-response format or verse-chorus structure where the congregations joined in on familiar choruses or repetitive lines; and the accepted exuberant and excited participation."⁵⁸

Afro-Americans responded to this kind of revival music and programs, because in many ways they reflected their native African roots and cultural orientation. It was out of the same African roots that later rock and roll music was born. It is hard to believe, notes Pattison, "that the most prosperous civilization in the history of mankind should in the fullness of its power ascribe its popular music to the influence of an oppressed African minority atrophying among the farmland of its poorest economic sector."⁵⁹ Yet it did happen. Why? The answer is to be found in the influence of humanism in Western societies—an ideological movement which, as we shall now see, shares a similar pantheistic, this-worldly orientation of rock music, and consequently found in such music a means to express the humanistic faith.

The Influence of Humanism. Humanism is an ideological movement that began in the sixteenth century with the cultural rebirth of the Renaissance and has gained increasing momentum until our time. We could sum up humanism as a shift in focus from divinity to humanity. The humanists largely repudiated the religious, other-worldly medieval culture, promoting instead self-centeredness, self-determination, self-pleasure, self-cultivation, and self-importance. During the succeeding centuries, humanism gave rise to such movements as the "Enlightenment," which emphasized the primacy of human reason; and "Romanticism," which idealized human passions and envisioned a fantasy world which could never be.

Arts, like music, came to fulfill the religious function vacated by traditional religion. This process was facilitated by the pantheistic orientation of Romanticism, an orientation

which prevails today in our society. Pantheism rejects the existence of any transcendent being, identifying the divine with all natural processes. What this means is that pantheists seek to find God, not beyond them, but within them and in the natural processes around them.

In his scholarly study Robert Pattison defines Pantheism as "a garbage-pail philosophy, indiscriminately mixing scraps of everything. Fine distinctions between right and wrong, high and low, true and false, the worthy and unworthy, disappear in pantheism's tolerant and eclectic philosophy."⁶⁰

Pattison notes that "pantheistic ideas have gradually usurped the place of established opinion. Heretical pantheism is the orthodoxy of modern culture, a revolution in thought for which there is no precedent."⁶¹ "Pantheism acknowledges . . . that we live in a universe of sensual experience of which I am the center and infinite circumference. By this admission, pantheism gains in honesty what it sheds in guilt."⁶²

Rock music, according to Pattison, is the ritual of the pantheistic culture of our time, as "a means of approaching the infinite."⁶³ Through the ecstasy of rock music, the fan transcends the limitation of time and space and plugs in a surrealistic world of fantasy.

Many Christians are attracted to rock music today and sanitize it for church use, because secular rock music provides what many describe as "a new kind of religious experience for young people."⁶⁴ In the next chapter we shall take a closer look at rock music as a religious phenomenon. For our immediate purpose Evan Davies offers an adequate description of such an experience: "The rockmania behaviors manifest entrancement in the technical sense of being entirely possessed by the experience . . . The regularity of the rhythm is enhanced by the overbalance of the bass and percussion. The output of excessively high volume creates a physiological sensory response which floods one's sensory modality. Reiteration of the thematic and verbal material also creates hypnotic effect."⁶⁵

The capacity of rock music to create an hypnotic effect, obviously attracts those Christians who are looking for an emotional "high" experience of God within them. Their theological understanding of God as present within them, and their eagerness to experience the immediacy of God within themselves, predisposes them to adopt rock music, albeit in a sanitized form, since such music provides the emotional stimulation they are looking for.

CONCLUSION

Four major conclusions emerge from the foregoing investigation. First, the production of music in Christian history has been largely influenced by the evolution of the understanding of God. The historical shift from the transcendental understanding of "God beyond us" during the medieval period, to the immanent conception of "God for us" during the sixteenth century reformation, and to "God within us" perception from the seventeenth-century to our times, helps us understand the gradual evolution of church music from the medieval chant, to the Lutheran chorale, to today's "Christian" rock.

Second, the convergence that has occurred in our time among (1) the immanent conception of "God within us" popular among Evangelical; (2) the humanistic/pantheistic view of God as a natural process, pervasive in our secular society; and (3) the pantheistic/immanent focus of rock music, derived from its African roots and attractive to Afro-Americans, each in its own way has facilitated the acceptance of rock music among Christians and secularly minded people. After all both groups are seeking to fulfill the inner urge for a pleasurable experience of the supernatural, and rock music provides a popular medium to approach the infinite through its hypnotic effects.

Third, rock music poses an insidious and subtle threat to the Christian faith by shifting the focus of faith from God to self and by undermining the Christian claim to divine revelation. Sociologist Robert Pattison expresses this threat concisely and eloquently, by saying: "Rock knocks the props from under religion, first, by shifting the locus of faith from God to self, and secondly, by depriving sects and churches of their claim to exclusive revelation. By forcing churches to compete on the basis of their ability to titillate the instincts of their worshippers, vulgar pantheism compels the champions of organized religions to abandon their pretension to superior truth and turns them into entrepreneurs of emotional stimulation. Once God has become a commodity used for self-gratification, his fortunes depend on the vagaries of the emotional marketplace, and his claim to command allegiance on the basis of omnipotence or omniscience, vanishes in a blaze of solipsism [self is the only reality] as his priests and shamans pander to the feeling, not the faith, of their customers."⁶⁶

Fourth, the worldview of rock music is inimical and antithetical to the Christian faith. By rejecting the transcendent/immanent God of Biblical revelation, and promoting instead a pantheistic view of the supernatural that can be experienced through its rhythmic sounds, rock music is gradually undermining the *raison d'être* of Christianity. The use of rock music in worship is dangerous because it turns the church service into a make-believe fantasy-world in which self-satisfaction is more important than the adoration of a Holy God.

A suitable closing statement for this chapter is provided by Pattison's prediction: "In the short run, rock and religion are complementary and will remain so until pantheism shall have made the traditional denominations as precarious as the passing California cults."⁶⁷

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Surf music was just rock and roll music, but with a spin: very sophisticated vocal harmonies. California had its own ideas about what rock and roll should be: a music for having fun at the beaches and at the parties. "Mersey-beat" changed the story of rock music forever. Mersey-beat came out of nowhere, but it came with the power of history. Britain had had a lousy music scene throughout the early Sixties. Worldview is fronted by Oliver Shaw, an Oxford-based songwriter, performer and producer. Worldview aims to fuse the sounds of rock, pop and dance music with insightful lyrics reminiscent of Elvis Costello or Morrissey and the melodic sensibility of the classic 60s acts. Oliver began playing in bands, including one with Coldplay's bassist-to-be, then spent several years honing a one-man band approach in his studio, writing, singing, recording and playing everything in the manner of Stevie Wonder, early Prince or World Party. He self-released a debut album, the relationship-themed "W" | read more