Christian Contemporary Music

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Introduction

It is no exaggeration to say that music has been one of the most controversial subjects in the history of the Christian Church. The nature and role of music has been debated almost endlessly. This debate has intensified in the last century. Music has become a very divisive issue in many churches, in some cases causing church splits. Most modern church-goers even select their church based on the type of music that is played in the services.¹

The history of debate is a history of extremes. There are some who have thought that music has little or no place in our lives. The story is told of an abbot in the fourth century named Pambo complaining because music had infiltrated his monastery. He said it was obvious to everyone with discernment that no monk could be spiritually minded while he was bellowing in his cell like a bull. On the other hand, there are those who uncritically accept nearly anything produced in the name of music as God’s gift to men.

Often discussions about music end up foundering on the shoals of subjectivism, especially in our society today. Everyone, it is said, has their own personal taste. You can’t judge any kind of music because it is up to the person involved to listen to what he or she likes. You can’t say anything negative about any style of music, because then you are judging a person and his tastes. The question arises in a society like ours, after centuries of heated disagreement, whether we can even make value judgements about music at all. Is it even possible to critique music and styles of music?

The answer not only is that we can, but that we must take a critical look at the music we listen to, whatever style it may be. We are commanded in I Thessalonians 5:21-22: “Prove [test] all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil.” The Christian has the obligation, placed upon him by Almighty God, to put everything to the test. This means that we may not accept the music around us without thought, no matter what style it may be. When it comes to music, we have a mandate from God to cling to what is good, and to put away everything that has the appearance of evil. We are called to exercise discernment.

Before delving into the topic of Contemporary Christian Music (abbreviated as CCM), we need to sketch a brief overview of what scripture says about music. This will give us a point of departure for evaluating CCM.

Music spans the ages, from creation through to the new heavens and earth. We read in Job 38:7 that the stars sang, and the sons of God shouted for joy when He laid the foundation of the earth. We are told in the book of Revelation that the Church of God will sing a new song to Him in heaven. Further, the Triune God also sings. The Father is said to rejoice over His people with singing (Zeph 3:17). The Son sang with His disciples regularly (Matt 26:30), and also will sing among His brethren in the Church (Hebrews 2:12). When the Holy Spirit fills His people, song is the result (Eph 5:18-19). Scripture regularly commands us to come before God with singing (ex Psalm 100). We see therefore that music is a blessing from God. Martin Luther wrote, “Next to the word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world.”

Music was given to us by God in order that with it we might glorify Him, and bring to Him the honor which is His due (Psalm 150). It honors God by speaking of His attributes, works, and salvation. It has been given to instruct us, admonish us, and encourage us. It is the means created by God for us to give expression to sorrow, conviction of sin, joy in God through the gospel, and adoration of God. Like all of God’s gifts, it has been given for us to richly enjoy (I Tim 6:17). The enjoyment of the gift of music reaches its peak when it is most God-honoring, when it glorifies Him.

Needless to say, music has been affected by the fall. This affect is twofold. First of all the words which are set to music are tainted by sin. Since the words of men reveal the abundance which is found in their hearts (Matt 12:34), and since the abundance of the heart of man is corrupt, the words men set to music often displease God. Second the form of the music itself has been distorted. The order, beauty, and harmony that characterize all of God’s creation, being the works of the God of order, have also been disrupted to varying degrees. Therefore it is possible to speak of better and worse kinds of music, as well as good and bad individual songs. In analyzing the music of any era, we need to examine both its words and musical

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2 Note Romans 1 and its description of the way in which fallen men warp the basic structure of God’s order. More will be said about this subject when analyzing the music itself.
form.

We also need to recognize the impact of redemption on music as the gift of God. Scripture often uses the word ‘new’ to describe the song of God’s people. In fact, the word ‘new’ is used more often to speak of song than anything else in the Bible. This newness reflects the awareness of the Church that it stands in restored fellowship with God because the guilt and power of sin have been overcome. The awareness of this transformation stamps the songs of the people of God with a new character, in distinction from the decaying productions of the world.

This means that the music of the Christian must be distinguished from the music of the world, both in form and content. The music of scripture is soaked and pervaded by the awareness of redemption. The redeeming power of God both in His redemptive historical acts and in the lives of His people as individuals is the theme of all of the songs of scripture. Even Psalms that speak of the blessing of marriage and material prosperity explicitly anchor their celebration of these gifts of God in redemption, in His blessing (note Psalm 127, 128).

Another issue that needs to be addressed by way of introduction is whether the writer is qualified to address this subject. I am sure that some of my readers are wondering whether I know enough about the topic to be able to examine it with a reasonable degree of accuracy. I want to assure any with this question that I have immersed myself in this issue for a number of years. I have attended several concerts and heard in person artists such as David Meece, Cheri Keaggy, Twila Paris, Steven Curtis Chapman, Avalon, Sandi Patti, Michael Card, and others. I have spent hours listening to Christian Contemporary Music of every stripe and sort, from Petra, Jars of Clay, and DC Talk, to Steve Green, Clay Crosse, and Rebecca St. James. I have read several available books, both by those defending and those lambasting the movement. I have listened to rock, alternative, pop, metal, ska, and reggae.

Finally, some may be wondering about my motives in dealing with this issue. It is no secret to those who know me that the CCM movement disturbs me a great deal. I have had nagging doubts and concerns about it from the moment a friend first introduced me to it in

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3 The degree of uniqueness will depend in part on the degree to which the world’s music has been debauched. Some cultures are influenced by a Christian worldview, even when the artists making the music are not Christians themselves.
6th grade. As I grew older, these concerns have deepened. I decided to take up a thorough and painstaking study of the issue, in order to determine whether my concerns were only a matter of personal taste, or whether they are based on objective grounds.

Many assume that anyone who looks at the issue with an unbiased and open mind cannot help but approve of CCM, even if it does not suit their personal taste. It is further assumed that those who object are simply a century or so behind in the forward march of cultural development, and are too fuddy-duddy to accept something new. Nearly everyone I have discussed this issue with at some point or another has challenged me to have an open mind. I have taken that challenge, and have prayerfully examined the CCM movement over the last few years. I am willing to listen to anyone who can help me understand modern music more clearly, and I have demonstrated this willingness concretely by the breadth of my research. Now I want to extend the same challenge to everyone who reads this journal. Are you willing to do what you have challenged me to do and approach this discussion with an open mind? Are you willing to have your convictions challenged and changed, whether you are a critic or a fan of CCM? Are you so dedicated to finding the truth that you are willing to reconsider your own opinions in light of evidence?

**Defining CCM**

The CCM movement is very difficult to define. It embraces a wide variety of musical styles and lyrics. If you browse a Christian bookstore, you will find anything from heavy metal, rock, pop, and alternative, to urban, contemporary, rap, country, and southern gospel. The line of distinction between these styles is blurred just as in the secular market, sometimes making it hard to distinguish one style from another.

The name ‘Contemporary Christian Music’ was adopted in the late 70’s to include everything from the hardest of rock to middle of the road music.\(^4\) This means any definition will be inadequate, because there are some songs that will fall outside of it. The

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\(^4\) I am indebted for most of my historical summary to CCM historian Paul Baker. He has been involved in the movement from the very beginning as a musician and historian. He has written a book called *Contemporary Christian Music: where it came from, what it is, where it’s going* (Crossway Books, Westchester IL, 1985). The information being credited in this footnote was taken from pages 123-4.
tremendous diversity found within the movement also makes analysis difficult. A knowledgeable listener could list exceptions to every critique, whether positive or negative. We do need to make an attempt though if we are to be obedient to the command of God to put everything to the test.

Though the CCM title embraces a wide variety of music, it does not embrace everything that is being written or performed today. In other words not all Christian music that is contemporary is called CCM. The Mattaniah Male Choir would not qualify. Nor would contemporary classical music fall in this category.

The name ‘CCM’ refers to the movement originating in the 60’s and 70’s which deliberately took the new style of music called rock & roll (in its various sub-genres, both the mild and the more extreme) and adopted it as Christian by adding new lyrics. At the risk of oversimplifying, I will refer to this music as rock music though I am aware of the different names given to different forms of the music. Several other authors, both secular and Christian, use the title ‘rock’ n’ roll’ for this purpose as well.5

It is also necessary to distinguish between CCM and CWM (contemporary worship music). CWM, though produced by many of the same companies and artists, is somewhat different in nature. CWM is music specifically written for the worship of the Church. It uses scripture more often, sometimes putting whole passages to music. It includes songs we sing at the Free Reformed Young People’s Camp such as ‘As the Deer.’ This type of music also needs evaluation (I Thess 5:21-22), but that falls beyond the scope of this paper.6

The History of CCM

In order to understand the history of the movement, we need a brief overview of the history of secular music in the 50’s and 60’s, because the CCM movement deliberately imitated the secular revolution in music. We can not speak about the movement without

6 This is somewhat difficult to do because many CCM artists reserve sections of their concerts for what they call “worship time,” in which the audience joins them in singing CWM choruses. However including it here would make a topic that is already very broad even broader.
reviewing the history of the rock music that it mimics. On a purely musical level, rock music emerged as a synthesis of rhythm & blues, pop, and country western music. Though the music developed in various directions and subgenres, the dominant feature of all of it was a powerful incessant beat. The result of this was that the rhythm began to dominate the music to such an extent that the melody, harmony, and lyrics assumed a secondary place in the overall effect of the music on the listener. “For the total folk function of rock, the rhythm of the music has always had as much meaning as its subject matter, for it has given the subject matter a real immediacy.” This immediacy has been variously described as vitality, energy, and sensuality.

The rise of rock though was not merely the result of combining elements of other musical styles. Rock music was created and adopted as a medium to give expression to the vehement rejection of contemporary institutions, traditions, and values by the younger generation of the 50’s. Secular rock historian Carl Belz notes: “The music emerged in response to a series of changing values and vital needs…Its history must be seen as a youth movement and as the reflection of a way of life radically different from the one which prevailed before the 1950’s. When rock emerged, it spoke to these new values, to this youth, and to this changed way of life.” Later on he notes “Rock is almost as much a way of life as it is a musical style.”

Rock was the vocalization of a rebellion against traditional and conventional values. It was a rejection of authority on religious, political, and social levels. The cold war was in full force, and the establishment was blamed for the lack of world peace and love. The

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8 Belz 30-31. Belz later on notes: “the market offered music for every type of taste. But nearly all of the new material possessed the beat of rock. Rock’s ability to maintain this beat, while changing superficially to absorb new influences, enabled it to grow…” (Belz 60).
9 Dr. Frank Garlock on pgs 67-68 of *Music in the Balance* notes that while 3-4 percent of a classical orchestra was responsible for rhythm, the sound coming from the typical rock group is 75 percent rhythm (Greenville SC, Majesty Music, 1973).
10 Belz 33.
11 Belz 4-5, 94.
traditional was dismissed in favor of the new. The rationalistic outlook of modern society was set aside in favor of the elevation of instinct and passion. In other words, the focus and purpose of life for the revolutionaries became pleasure without restraint. It was raw hedonism: eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. Rock music became a primary medium for expressing the values and lifestyle of this revolution. Noted cultural analyst Ken Myers states: “Rock music was made to order for this new cultural vision. Bursting onto the scene when it did, it thus had a remarkably wide appeal: it had a natural appeal to youth, who enjoy noisy, emotional, and sensual displays.”

In the middle of this chaotic scene, CCM had its birth. It rose out of the Jesus Movement of the 60’s. A large number of the hippies turned to Christianity. One reason Jesus appealed to the Jesus Movement is that they felt they had discovered a new Jesus, one with long hair and a beard, one who was a revolutionary, one who shared the characteristics adopted by the youth of the late 60’s and 70’s.

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12 This mindset resulted in promiscuity, drug trips, and the pursuit of bizarre cultic groups (such as Eastern mysticism and the occult). It also resulted in the Woodstock festivals (ostensibly ‘love’ festivals, but in reality carnal orgies), and the rise of modern feminism. The men began growing long hair because it was another way of expressing their rebellion against societal norms. These hippies called themselves ‘freaks’ – rejectors of conventional society.

13 Kenneth Myers has written an outstanding analysis of popular culture and its effect on character. It is highly recommended to all, especially to parents, teachers, and pastors. Some of his conclusions are weak, but his analysis is superior work. It gives excellent insight into our culture. The book is called All God’s Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1989). The quote above comes from page 150.

14 Baker 21. This is a trend that continues with blasphemous results. CCM artist Carman sings this in his song *Come into This House* “I’ve got news you can choose / you need to be delivered / with Christ you win / without Christ you lose / But if you Jam with the Lamb, you’re smooth / Cut out the jive, cut into church / You need a healing touch / A big strong hand / Come rock with the flock / with the brothers that jam.” Daniel Band sings in *Party in Heaven* “There’s a party in Heaven / the bread is unleaven / the tree of life is growin’ fine / it’s way past eleven / my number is seven / the lamb and I are drinkin’ new wine.” Mark Stuart of the group *Audio Adrenalin* wrote “…the only difference [between rock and Christian rock] is the lyrics and then the difference is sometimes subtle…at the basic root, there’s no difference…Christianity is about rebellion. Jesus Christ is the biggest rebel to ever walk the face of the earth…he was crucified for his rebellion. Rock n’ roll is about the same thing – rebellion…to me rock and the church go hand in hand” (Pensacola News Journal, Pensacola Florida, March 1, 1998, p 1,6E). This is a complete contradiction of the facts. Christ was not a
When they did so, they brought their music with them. This was natural because they saw their new music as the marker of their identity, and it was inevitable that they would bring it with them in their reaction to the structures of the traditional world. Their rock music portrayed itself as free from hypocrisy, as an expression of the deep emotions and questions of the new generation. It embodied a rejection of the past in a quest for relevance with modern experience. They saw their music as a viable and spiritual art form.

The established church was reluctant to accept the new music, because of its associations with and origin in the moral bankruptcy of the Cultural Revolution. This meant that the music was played privately in the beginning. Gatherings such as ‘Christian hootenannies,’ where musicians gathered on weekdays to play and sing their new music, were the means of spreading it. These musicians charged the Church with stagnating musically since the civil war, and promoted their efforts as ‘sacred music with a flair.’

New groups like the Pilgrim 20 or the Spurrows sprang up. The new music was called Jesus music, or Jesus rock. Another known name was Mylon LeFevre, who released an album called ‘Mylon.’ He had grown up in a family of southern gospel singers. He left the family because he wanted to rock. He had already written hit songs for Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, and others. He explained upon his resignation that he wanted to “reach young people with what I believe in – that Jesus gave His life for my sins – but I’m not gonna shove religion at them.” His debut album contained mostly the new Jesus Music, but latter albums drifted away from a Christian theme.

It was an ambition of the fledgling movement to record a hit with biblical content that would top the secular charts. They wanted the attention of the media and the people at large. In 1965 the song ‘Amen’ reached number seven on the charts. Turn! Turn! Turn! (loosely based on Ecclesiastes 3) by the Byrds reached number one. The song “People get ready” got to number fourteen. However,
much to the disappointment of the early singers of the Jesus Movement, there was no lasting impact on the secular scene. Individual songs got the attention of the nation but had no lasting effect.

The secular radio stations refused to put the new music on the air, with the exception of the occasional song. Therefore the movement had to find other ways of getting their music out to the public. They began to work to get their own radio programs. The first CCM radio show came on in the early 70’s through the work of Scott Ross. By early 1970 the show was on 16 radio stations, and the list grew at a rapid pace. The format was a combination of the top secular hits, and Jesus rock. Soon he had a syndicated program that was on 175 stations nationwide. Another big day for CCM music was the Explo ’72 program put on by Bill Bright, founder of Campus Crusade. It featured prominent speakers and also the new music. Many singers rose to prominence as the result of this meeting of 100,000 people in the Cotton Bowl in Texas.18

Another way of spreading the music was through coffeehouses, such as ‘The Avalon’ in Ohio, ‘The Greater Life Coffeehouse’ in Dallas, and ‘The Salt Company’ in Detroit. These coffeehouses were places in the inner city where musicians would play for troubled youth from the street. A well-known coffeehouse was ‘The Adam’s Apple’ in Fort Wayne, Indiana. The CCM rock group Petra got its start here. As various groups were formed, they would tour the coffeehouses, bringing their message to the down and out of society. Many of the musicians were very poor, and made do without financial backing. They would pack a 5-gallon jar of pickles for food, and a few other odds and ends, and set off on tours. Needless to say they would arrive home exhausted and malnourished.

They persisted though, convinced that their music was a God-appointed way of spreading the gospel. Many touring musicians would expect the local church to be involved, and to prepare for a concert by praying and working to promote it.19 Music was equal to preaching in some minds: they saw music as a means of spreading the

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18 Baker 43-46, 55.
19 Baker 61, 65-70.
word.20

Another means of spreading the new music was festivals. Secular rock had its outdoor festivals in the 60’s such as Woodstock, the Monterey Pop Festival in California, and the Palm Beach Rock Festival in 1969. Jesus Music also had its festivals, though on a smaller scale. The first major festival for the CCM movement was the Faith Festival in Evansville Indiana, in March 1970. This led to the organization of other festivals across the country. They even started holding an annual festival at amusement parks like Knott’s Berry Farm in California. A mark of these festivals was ecumenicity. Churches from diverse backgrounds played together, and the denominational barriers crumbled through the music. Some of the Jesus Music festivals were attended by as many as 16,000 people. It was at festivals like these that many bands got their start by creating a fan base. It was also an opportunity to spread records and other memorabilia.21

There is a significant date to be noted that has marked and marred the CCM movement a great deal. Dr. H.T. Spence writes “In 1973 a Neo-Evangelical movement swept across America called ‘Key ’73.’ Many of the evangelical denominations…joined this movement, believing it would be the strongest evangelistic thrust to date in our country. An extensive invitation was sent out for new music to be written that promoted the message of ‘Key ‘73’ with several stipulations: the words righteousness, judgement, holiness, repentance, and several other biblical terms were not allowed to be used, and the lyrics were to be of a positive nature. There was an intentional effort made to write non-offensive songs. A number of these were produced that year through this evangelical effort, strengthening the move away from Biblical,

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20 Note this exasperated comment by one touring musician trying to make a place for his music in the church: “a lot of people think that the preaching ministry has some kind of supremacy over the ministry in music” (Baker 63). There is even the incredible idea that the main way God works is through music. For example, “many people agreed that the Lord was busy with both the East Coast and the West Coast, and the main tie between them was the musicians and their relationships” (Baker 94). Out of this conviction the Fellowship of Contemporary Christian Ministries (FCCM) had its start. Needless to say this is not a Biblical or Reformed conviction (cf Rom 10:11-15).

21 Baker 82-6.
doctrinal standards of music.”

The result of this pressure, both from Key 73 and from similar sentiments in the evangelical community, has been that most of CCM is characterized by a vague and weak message. This problem affects not only the CCM movement, but also many evangelical churches in the United States and Canada. It has been chronicled and lamented repeatedly by noted authors such as David Wells, J.I. Packer, R.C. Sproul, and Michael Horton.

During the 1970’s, the CCM movement began to grow rapidly. On March 15, 1975, KYMS radio station in Santa Ana (California) became one of the first radio stations dedicated to CCM. Another early station that aired the new music that year was KBHL-FM in Nebraska, called ‘the Sound of the New Life.’ It was sponsored by Larry King and several associates. It aired on March 6. Early on they began sponsoring and promoting concerts by groups such as the 2nd chapter of Acts, Barry McGuirre, and other well-known artists. Soon magazines dedicated to Jesus Rock were published. The paper ‘Rock in Jesus’ was published, and combined in 73 with Right On! magazine. Then in 1975 the magazine ‘Harmony’ was published, dedicated to keeping up on the new music. This touched off rapid growth in the number of magazines, as well as the number of radio stations available.

In 1977 Myrrh Records launched into a huge advertising campaign that used all the noise and glamour of a movie premiere in Hollywood. Giant posters, sample records, commercials, and displays carried the message. The label at this time had the largest roster of contemporary musicians in the country, including David Meece, Randy Matthews, and others. Myrrh also distributed several independent labels’ recordings (all under the name ‘Word, Inc’). Sparrow, another new label in California, began in 1977 with the release of a Keith Green album.

This brings up an ongoing debate about the identity of the

23 This subject will be dealt with more fully below in the section “The Lyrics.”
24 Baker 89-102.
25 Baker 103.
movement. Is it entertainment, ministry, or both? How much of the sales techniques of the entertainment industry can be used? Some have declared that their music is ministry and evangelism. They begin their concerts with prayer, and conclude their concerts with evangelistic invitations.26 Others have a different take on the issue. April Hefner, editor of CCM magazine, states this: “The truth is that, whatever else it may be, Christian music is very much a part of show business. While many fans would prefer to call it a ministry, the fact of the matter is that we are immersed in the entertainment industry…while changing lives can be our hope and our goal, let’s not live under the illusion that Christian music is ultimately responsible for making it happen.”27

1978 was another key year for the movement. Due to the widely expanding variety in the CCM music field, the distinction between the Jesus Music and other contemporary Christian music faded. Ralph Charmichael in a magazine article came up with 11 different types of Christian music. The name CCM was finally adopted in the late 70’s, to include everything from middle of the road music to the hardest of rock. The movement expanded rapidly, and the lines of distinction between the various styles began to blur just as it had done in the secular market.28

The late 70’s also saw the emergence of disturbing trends in the movement. The movement had crystallized, and turned into an industry with markets and popularity, hits, and exposure. The movement had been commercialized. Richard Quebedeux in his book ‘The Worldly Evangelicals’ writes: “historically since the time of Constantine, whenever the Church has become established – too popular, too respectable – corruption and secularism have become rampant within its ranks.”29 This was certainly happening in the CCM movement. A new generation was rising which knew almost nothing about the Bible. They were imitating secular rock in its constant quest for novelty and shock value. They were adopting punk rock, and making ads and covers for their music with the same somber and

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26 This is done following the invitation system, where those who want to be saved are directed to come forward or to go into an adjoining room. There staff members and counselors are available to assist those who show up. Often though a clear presentation of the gospel is lacking here as well.
grimacing looks on the covers as the secular artists. In the words of Paul Baker, “People were starting to worship the music, rather than center on Christ.”

All of this did not take place without some reaction by industry insiders. In 1983 there was a movement toward dealing with holiness and separation from the world. Dallas Holm wrote:

“Quite frankly as I look at a lot of contemporary Christianity, I don’t see much that I would define as holiness. On the contrary, I see a very disturbing trend of people seeking to be accepted by the world, applying the world’s methods and standards to Christianity, rather than the other way around… I see a lot of letting down of the standards, a lot of permissiveness, and a lot of watering down of the gospel, especially in the field of Christian music. People writing shallow songs, or shallow magazines, or preaching shallow sermons. I think the thing I’m most challenged about at this point in my life is that as I read the words of Scripture, and as I take them and apply them literally to my own life, I realize that I have to undergo a revolutionary, radical change in my whole way of thinking… We need to quit endeavoring to try to be accepted by the world and try to sneak Jesus in, because it was never meant to be that way” (italics added).

One anonymous recording engineer voiced his doubts this way: “We’ve done a great job of converting the Church to accept rock and roll, but I don’t know how well we’ve done in converting people to Jesus with the music.”

The lines of distinction between various styles continued to blur. “Praise and worship” music provided a middle ground on the musical spectrum between traditional music and the new music. It became a key phrase in Christian music in the 1980’s. They called it vertical praise music. The Gaithers, and Maranatha choruses contributed to this movement. It was older style music with a contemporary flair. They are described as ‘rousing, building, fully-orchestrated, contemporary, neo-classical praise songs.’ Artists such as Michael Card and Michael W. Smith contributed contemporary praise songs relying almost entirely on scripture passages. John Michael

30 Baker 117.
31 Baker 166.
32 Baker 213.
Talbot wrote from a Franciscan monastery, delving into the past and bringing up old tunes into the new music.\(^{33}\)

In 1984 a song-writer named Steve Green, a former member of the group White Heart, released an album under the Sparrow Records label. Sandi Patti and Twila Paris were among the musicians who helped bridge the gap between contemporary and traditional church music. In 1983 the Benson Company, under whose Impact label Patti sang, released the Mastertrax recording of the music. This meant the music could be played while other singers in church performed the words. These soon became as familiar to churches as the piano and organ.

The music continues to hybridize rapidly in all directions, making it increasingly difficult to analyze as a whole. It includes everything from gentle songs featuring only a singer and his guitar, to rock bands featuring full accompaniment, lasers, steam, and glitz. The great variety within the movement is illustrated in the annual awards ceremony of the Gospel Music Association. Every year this association hands out its Dove Awards to the best artists in various categories. These categories continue to expand constantly.\(^{34}\)

At the current time the CCM industry is worth around $450 million a year (USD). In 1995 there were 250 radio stations in the US playing CCM as their primary format. One fourth of the sales in the Christian bookstores in the States is music related.\(^{35}\) Not surprisingly, this has attracted considerable secular attention. Most of the recording companies are now in secular hands because of their profitability.\(^{36}\) These secular owners are not committed to Christianity, but to making money. They exert pressure on the artists to tone down their message, and to produce music that sells.\(^{37}\)

This in short is the history of the CCM movement, from its humble beginnings in garages and coffeehouses, to its present glitz and glitter as a part of the entertainment industry. It gives us an overview

\(^{33}\) Baker 168-171.

\(^{34}\) Baker 170-3.

\(^{35}\) Cloud 16-17.

\(^{36}\) "Christian Music is now virtually owned by the secular entertainment industry” (Christianity Today, May 20, 1996, p20).

\(^{37}\) Note these words by Danny Goodwin, the director of Virgin Records: “Our position is, whether these artists are Christians, Jews, Moslems, black, white, Albanian, or whatever, they’re making great music. And that’s what Virgin does – we’re in the market to sell what we call quality music to the largest number of people we can” (CCM Magazine, August 1998, p25).
of the movement, along with some of its main features, and provides a point of departure for a closer look at CCM.

Analysis of the Movement

The Entertainment Issue

We now need to proceed with analyzing the CCM movement, in obedience to what scripture teaches (I Thessalonians 5:21-22). In the first place, it was noted earlier that the CCM movement is wrestling with an identity crisis. Is the work of these artists ministry or entertainment? This question continues to provoke discussion about the place of music in the life of a Christian. Does all music have to be evangelistic or Biblically oriented? Do the lyrics have to mention God and truth in order for music to be called Christian? Is there to be a clear-cut difference between music that is written for ‘religious functions,’ and music that is written to entertain?

What has caused this conundrum? There are several factors at work here, but there are two in particular that need to be mentioned. First, the nature of the music itself has something to do with the debate. Rock music was created to entertain, in the modern sense of the word. This means that it is produced in order to gratify the immediate desires of the consumer, rather than being molded by a clear understanding of what is true, good and beautiful. It is aimed at producing excitement rather than revealing something about the good, true, and beautiful.

This issue will be addressed in greater detail below, but it has implications for the entertainment question as well. It means that when CCM artists deliberately imitate secular rock, they are adopting music that is entirely entertainment oriented. This is evident in the glitz and fanfare that is an integral part of a rock concert regardless of who the performer is. It is no surprise then that when they reproduce

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38 We are touching on the third branch of philosophy here, called aesthetics. Whenever we apply standards of what is good, true, or beautiful to art, we are making aesthetic value judgements. Modern culture is notable for its relativism, meaning that beauty is purely in the eye of the beholder. By contrast historic Christianity has affirmed that there are objective standards by which such judgements must be made. Cf below, where rock music itself is analyzed under the heading ‘the music itself.’ Note the book All God’s Children and Blue Suede Shoes by Kenneth Myers for a thorough discussion of this issue.
the same atmosphere, even in a somewhat sanitized form, that their work is considered to be entertainment. Note again the words of April Hefner, current editor of CCM magazine: “The truth is that, whatever else it may be, Christian music is very much a part of show business. While many fans would prefer to call it a ministry, the fact of the matter is that we are immersed in the entertainment industry.”

Second the name of the movement has added to the debate. Many of the early artists called their music ‘Jesus Music.’ They saw it as a viable spiritual art form that could be used to bring the gospel to others. They saw that many people were turned off by any cultural institution that could be construed as part of the establishment, and so they wanted to appeal to these people in a language that they could identify with. Since the new music was such a central part of the Cultural Revolution, many of the new musicians decided to use it to bring the message of the gospel to the down and out of society. Therefore Jesus Music concerts were called ministry, evangelism, and worship.

What has been the result of this question of identity? Many have mixed the two and decided that their work is both entertainment and ministry. This has had disastrous and at times blasphemous consequences. The motive, goal, and means used to reach that goal are radically different when you want to produce entertainment, than when seeking to do ministry. It is like trying to mix oil and water. Obviously this does not mean that our work needs to be boring, archaic, or irrelevant in order to be called ministry. But it does mean that there is a different way of doing things when one is seeking to entertain, or to minister. When artists who claim to be doing ministry have not given clear Biblical thought to the nature of ministry, their work is not acceptable.

Let me give some examples of the effects of mixing the two. I attended a David Meece concert in 1995. The concert was promoted as ministry, and included evangelism. David Meece arrived in a glittering outfit that looked no different than the typical rock star seen on MTV (Music Television for secular rock). As the evening unfolded, he was quite obviously impressed with his own status as a star in the industry. In between songs David talked. He alluded to God and the Bible, but in a way that often had the audience in stitches rather than in awe or under conviction.

At one point when attempting to describe the sovereignty of

God, he used an extended analogy about being in the shower. You feel in control until someone flushes the toilet, and then you realize you are not. He compared this to waking up to the fact that God is sovereign in your life. However he got sidetracked describing slime on the walls and hairballs on the drain of the shower, so that his audience was laughing nearly hysterically.

Then near the end of the concert he decided that the Spirit of God was moving among the people, so he led us in singing choruses over and over again, finally ending in an invitation for those who wanted to be saved to come forward. The sad thing was that a clear and Biblical presentation of the gospel was lacking the entire evening. This is by no means abnormal in CCM concerts, and yet this sort of thing goes on in the name of ministry!

In another concert that I attended, a well-known conservative artist was trying to remember the last time he had been in town for a concert. He concluded ‘I have not been in Grand Rapids since God was a boy.’

These kinds of incidents are obviously completely out of place. Whenever anyone in scripture was conscious of the presence of God, they reacted with awe and a trembling heart (cf Eccl 5:1-3). Even in moments when the joy of the Lord overflowed in their hearts, you do not read that they forgot their place before Almighty God and became jocular or trivial in their language. The Apostle Paul was all things to all men, but this never included clowning around to get or keep people’s attention. He always kept a serious, earnest tone. That tone comes through at times in some artists, but the effect is often undone in other parts of the concert.

The result is that the entertainment dynamics of the music keeps a great deal of CCM from being Biblical ministry, while the ‘ministry’ aspect keeps a great deal of it from being acceptable entertainment.

Another of the consequences of the entertainment dynamic in CCM is that non-Christian businessmen have recognized the money making potential of the music and have bought out most of the record companies. Stan Moser, an executive at Star Song Records, recently said in an interview that he is disturbed by the trends he sees today. “In fact, I would probably be more inclined to call the industry ‘commercial Christian music,’ rather than ‘contemporary Christian music.’” Singer Steve Taylor writes “What bothers me about the

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pop labels right now is that I don’t believe there is anything they wouldn’t do for money.”41 Michael Card states “When I look at Christian music as an industry, I’m always discouraged by it. The direction and value system are getting worse faster than any of us can imagine. There’s no community in Christian music, but instead there’s competition, commercialism, and individualism.”42 Both of these singers were quick to add that there are still people in the movement who are driven by a sense of call, but even so, these are very disturbing remarks.

Another result of this commercialization is that concerts have become quite expensive. For a ministry, the teams of musicians charge a great deal for their concerts, cd’s, and other memorabilia. Obviously they can’t be expected to give them away, but the money that they make exceeds what ought to be charged. This is evident when secular companies are eager to buy out these ‘ministries’ because of their tremendous money making potential. One disgusted critic summarized his thoughts on the commercialization of CCM by saying, “The CCM industry calling itself a ministry is like McDonald’s calling itself a hunger-relief organization.”43

The secular companies who now own most of CCM are putting pressure on the artists to remove anything that might cause offence to unbelievers. After singer Wes King began a promising career, his record label sent him to ‘CCM’s finishing school’ to increase his marketability. “I found myself going to this lesbian atheist who was going to tell me how to talk in interviews.” He was also instructed to use terms like ‘my faith’ instead of ‘Jesus,’ and ‘dysfunction’ instead of ‘sin.’ When Michael Card was working on a recent album based on the book of Hebrews, one of the marketing people from Sparrow Records said, “is there any way we can do this so people don’t know it’s about Hebrews?”44

This serious problem has come about because ministry was made entertainment. The world saw the cash value of the entertainment, and wants to ditch the ministry aspect to make money on the entertainment. This troubling reality in the CCM movement means that a great deal of the music produced under these influences is not worthy of the support of Christian people because it has watered

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41 Ibid, pg 25.
42 Ibid, pg 22.
43 World Magazine, June 17, 2000, pg 87 (letters to the editor).
44 These quotes are from World Magazine, May 13, 2000, pg 19.
down the contents of the music to an unacceptable degree. It is conforming to the world, rather than being transformed (Rom 12:1-2).

The Lyrics

As we continue to pursue our calling to put everything to the test, and to discern, we need to pay particular attention to the lyrics of CCM.

It was noted earlier while considering the history of the movement that the lyrics of CCM are generally theologically weak and vague. This has been a staple criticism of the movement over the years. I want to make my point here, however, not by quoting critics but by quoting industry insiders. Michael Card stated in a recent interview:

“The lyrics of a good number of songs don’t betray anything specifically Christian – there may have been some moral message, but not a lot of the big songs are identifiably Christian...there is an essential part of the gospel that is not ever going to sell. The gospel is good news, but it is also bad news: you are a sinner, and you are hopeless. How is a multimillion-dollar record company going to take that? That’s a part of the message too, and if that’s taken out – and it frequently is in Christian music – it ceases to be the gospel” (italics added).

Stan Moser, a retired executive with Star Song Records, has also expressed his reservations about the message of CCM after 27 years in the industry: “But to be candid, I look at the majority of the music I hear today and think it’s virtually meaningless.”

The vague nature of much of the lyrical content is readily admitted by some of the musicians as a deliberate and positive aspect of their music. Robert Sweet of the group Stryper said “you won’t pick up this record (Against the Law) and hear anything that says ‘God’ or ‘Christ.’ That was intentionally done. We were tired of

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45 Not all music produced by or enjoyed by Christians needs to be focussed on worship or evangelism. There is a place for music that entertains. This will be discussed in greater detail in the last section of this paper, under the heading “Principles for Discernment.”
47 Ibid, pg 27.
people coming back with excuses, saying, ‘Sorry we can’t play this.’ MTV’s got to play this and the radio’s got to play it or it doesn’t serve the purpose.’ Why does the world need to approve of what a Christian produces in order for it to serve its purpose? The world hates the true gospel, and the name of Christ. Why do some artists think then that their music is not acceptable unless it meets the standards of the world? Is this not showing more concern for the approval of sinful men than for standing by the truth of God?

Amy Grant prefers to be “a bit sneaky” with her lyrics. “We don’t want to shove anything down anybody’s throat. When you start getting churchy, they start running.” This did not keep the Lord Jesus Christ, the apostles, or the prophets in the Bible from clear and direct presentations of the gospel. The crowds stopped following Christ because they did not want to hear what He had to say. The apostles ended up in jail. The prophets were persecuted and killed. All this could have been avoided simply if they were a little less ‘churchy’ and learned how to present their message without standing for absolute truth with conviction and boldness. When you take out the offence of the gospel to keep people from being offended, what is left is no longer the gospel. Instead you are being ashamed of the gospel. The world is open about glorying in the things that ought to be their shame (Phil 3:19). But it seems like many CCM artists think they need to be ashamed about what ought to be their glory.

If you examine many of the top songs, their message is so vague that unless you knew ahead of time that they were part of the CCM movement, you would see nothing identifiably Christian about their lyrics. Many secular artists like Michael Jackson also sing vaguely about the power of love in the same way, and you can not distinguish his lyrics from those of some CCM artists.

50 For example, Michael W. Smith sings his hit song Love me Good: “Sometimes I feel like this world / is just one big merry-go-round / you gotta hold on tight / or you get hurled through the air / Yea, life is a 3 ring circus / with clowns and freaks and camels and such / and you never know when you might be / attacked by the bears / [give me love, give me love, love me good….the chorus] Sometimes I wish I was in a movie / or some 70’s TV thing / where everything gets neatly wrapped up at the end of the show / Yea, but this ain’t Hollywood / and this sure ain’t the Brady Bunch / and how this plot’s gonna all pan out / I don’t really know [chorus repeated several times]. This is a typical song by...
Calvin Jones, a Presbyterian musician from Colorado, has some insightful words with regard to this phenomenon.

“Another common falsehood in Christian music is the ‘easy love’ deception. Love towards God and man is described in about every possible way except as obedience to God’s law-word. The emotions of love and sentimentality abound in Christian music while the actions of love defined by God’s laws are conspicuously absent. Our Lord said, ‘If you love me you will keep my commandments’ (John 14:15). Love is keeping God’s commandments with respect to God and our neighbor. With love being the dominant subject of both pop and Christian music, why is it that I have never heard the true definition of love from either of them? I expect this from the world, but not from Christians.”

A clear example of this problem is the popular song produced by Jaci Velasquez, called John 3:16. The Bible text is the chorus.

[Chorus] I try so hard to find the words to say to let you know how great is this God to whom I pray. Nothing can or ever will compare to the peace that flows in your soul when he is living there. [Chorus]. O I know you’ve been through so much it’s hard to contemplate letting to and reaching out in trust, but I know the simple truth, that love is here for you so take him at his word and see what he can do. [Chorus] The promise is yours and mine. Take hold of this step for the rest of your life. But it’s time to take a step of faith. Be prepared for Jesus’ love to carry you away. [Chorus].

Notice how a text and chapter of the Bible that are God-centered have been turned by these lyrics into a message that is centered on my own experience. The text centers on God’s love. The lyrics by Velasquez center on the self-esteem of her audience. Christ has become someone who is filled with love, and who is just waiting to meet all my felt needs. All I need to do is take the step of faith and be carried away by love and peace.

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52 {Copyright}
There are elements of truth in this song, but on the whole it is a tragic reduction of the gospel. Of course the whole counsel of God does not need to be expressed in one song, but this song illustrates the way in which the gospel has been reduced by the great majority of CCM artists to the thing that meets all my felt needs and soothes all my traumas and hurts. They have made the gospel out to be the cure for all my woes and sorrows, rather than the revelation of the glory, character, and redemption of God. It is not God centered, but man-centered. The greatest problem we have is no longer our own sin and guilt, but the misery and troubles in life.

Most presentations of the gospel by CCM artists in their songs or in their concerts are distorted by this problem. The lyrics are one-sided in that they stress the love of God for all men almost exclusively, without regard for the rest of the attributes of God. What you get then is a concert attended by all sorts of people, who are patted on the back and given a bandaid that fails to deal with the deeper issues of life. Everyone living in a world cursed by sin longs for a utopia of some sort. The singers tap this desire and evoke it with poignant imagery. Then they promise that all who have such longings will be saved by Jesus when He comes. When attached with a style of music which has tremendous power to stir the emotions, you end up with ‘feel-goodism.’ The gospel of repentance and faith is often completely missing. Such gospel peddling is deceit, not proclamation.

What a far cry from the bold and God-centered presentations of the gospel in the Scriptures (cf Acts 17:16-32). It is also a far cry from the songs of the triumphant church in Revelation (ex Rev 4:11, 5:9-14). In Scripture the first concern is the honor and character of God. There all His attributes are mentioned, and He is not reduced to a benevolent and sappy deity consisting mostly of love and kindness. When you reduce God in this way you end up destroying the gospel in the end. A half-truth easily becomes a whole lie.

A.W. Tozer has powerfully outlined the great lack in contemporary Christianity of a biblical knowledge of the character of God. His words were written about the modern Church as a whole, but apply to the subject at hand.

“The Church has surrendered her once lofty concept of God and has substituted for it one so low, so ignoble, as to be utterly unworthy of thinking, worshipping men. This she has done not deliberately, but little by little and without her
knowledge; and her very unawareness only makes her situation all the more tragic…

It is my opinion that the Christian conception of God current in these middle years of the twentieth century is so decadent as to be utterly beneath the dignity of the Most High God and actually to constitute for professed believers something amounting to a moral calamity.

All the problems of heaven and earth, though they were to confront us together and at once, would be nothing compared with the overwhelming problem of God: that He is; what He is like; and what we as moral beings must do about Him.

The man who comes to a right belief about God is relieved of ten thousand temporal problems…The one mighty single burden of eternity begins to press down upon him with a weight more crushing than all the woes of the world piled upon one another. That mighty burden is his obligation to God. It includes an instant and lifelong duty to love God with every power of mind and soul, to obey Him perfectly, and to worship Him acceptably. And when the man’s laboring conscience tells him that he has done none of these things, but has from childhood been guilty of foul revolt against the Majesty in the heavens, the inner pressure of self-accusation may become too heavy to bear.

The gospel can lift this destroying burden from the mind…but unless the weight of the burden is felt the gospel can mean nothing to the man; and until he sees a vision of God high and lifted up, there will be no woe and no burden. Low views of God destroy the gospel for all who hold them.”53

Some artists do make use of biblical words, but you don’t learn anything about what these words mean. They are left vague and undefined, meaning that what is left is the form of sound words without their power.54 Contrast this with the lyrics of great songs such as ‘Amazing Grace’ which use these terms in a way that reveals

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54 It is important to realize that just because Biblical vocabulary is used, the Biblical message is not necessarily portrayed. We need to ask whether the words used are explained and used in the same way the Bible does.
something about what they mean. Contrast this with scripture that clearly brings the message of the gospel home to the heart.

In order to illustrate the point further, I have included the text of two songs. Both are considered classic works in their own genre. The first is called ‘Liquid’ by the group Jars of Clay.

Arms held down
Are you telling me something
Eyes turned down
Are you looking for someone

This is the one thing, the one thing, the one thing that I know

[Chorus]

Blood stained brow
Are you dying for nothing
Flesh and blood
Is it so elemental  [repeat Chorus]

Blood stained brow
He wasn’t broken for nothin
Arms nailed down
He didn’t die for nothin [repeat Chorus].

Contrast this with several stanzas from a hymn like ‘O Dearest Jesus.’

O dearest Jesus, what law hast thou broken
That such sharp sentence should on thee be spoken;
Of what great crime hast thou to make confession,
What dark transgression?

Whence some these sorrows, whence this mortal anguish?
It is my sins for which thou Lord must languish;
Yea, all the wrath, the woe, thou dost inherit,
This I do merit.

What punishment so strange is suffered yonder!
The Shepherd dies for sheep that loved to wander;
The master pays the debt his servants owe him,
Who would not know him.55

55 {Copyright}
Compare this also to hymns like ‘When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,’ or ‘There is a Fountain Filled with Blood.’ The message in these hymns is clear and theologically accurate. The production of Jars of Clay by contrast is not worthy of the name Christian. There is no message at all in these words. The sad thing is that this is by no means an exception in CCM, but rather the norm. The incredible thing is that it is called ministry or a Christian message.

Singer Steve Camp has written a protest against problems in the movement, in which he points out among other things that the biblical gospel is missing in many CCM songs. He called his protest “A call for Reformation in the CCM Industry.” It consists of an introduction and 107 theses.57 He writes in the introduction:

“Contemporary Christian Music originally began unashamedly declaring Jesus Christ as Lord. Within a few years His name was replaced by several generic titles filtering out the name of God ultimately to the non-specific cognomen “Love.” This led to a multitude of synonyms: “The Man Upstairs;” “My Higher Power;” “Our Family Values Expert;” ad nauseam…ad infinitum. This Biblical illiteracy I’ve coined as theological ebonics – biblical language diminished to unintelligible chatter affirmed as profound, acceptable spiritual truth. Os Guiness is “spot on” when saying “[We have seen a change] from the emphasis on ‘serving God’ to an emphasis on ‘serving the self’ in serving God.” The object of faith is no longer Christ, but our self-esteem; the goal of faith is no longer holiness, but our happiness; and the source of our faith is no longer the Scriptures, but our experience. Christian music currently reflects this. We are producing a generation of people that “feel” their God, but do not know their God.”

Note carefully what is happening here. There is a theological shift taking place in evangelicalism that is reflected in the lyrics of CCM. This shift is a movement from focussing on the objective truths of God to focussing on subjective religious experience for its own sake. In the 19th century the focus in the Christianity at large shifted from dogma and doctrine to experience. Schleiermacher, an influential

56 {Copyright?}
57 His theses can be found on the Internet.
liberal theologian, even said that religion consists of feelings and attitudes. In his work called ‘On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers’ he rejected dogma or ethics as the groundwork of Christianity. Instead he said true religion is a matter of feeling, either of feeling in general, or the feeling of absolute dependence. This concept has taken over in North American churches, even among those who would reject the theology of a man like Schleirermacher.

Now of course as people with a valuable Reformed experiential heritage, we have historically recognized the need to know the power of the truths of the gospel in our own experience. A purely mental acquaintance with the truths of the Bible leads to dead orthodoxy, and can not save us. We need to experience the power of the truth in our own hearts. Yet we may not become so focussed on experiencing the truth that we lose sight of the truth itself and focus on experience by itself. When we focus on experience rather than on applying the objective truth of the gospel in a way that aims to impact us and produce experience indirectly, we will ultimately lose genuine Biblical experience.

This shift has occurred in the CCM movement to a large extent, as it has in the Christian Church at large. As Steve Camp said so well, the focus has shifted from knowing God to feeling and experiencing God. We need to be careful not to confuse religious feelings or spiritual feelings with being spiritual in the biblical sense of the word. Being spiritual does not mean talking about your experiences or emotions, but it means understanding and living the truth itself. When ‘spiritual’ talk is divorced from the language and teachings of the Bible, it may be religious talk but it is no longer Christian.

Another problem that is evident in many CCM lyrics is that they are simplistic and irreverent. This is related directly to the reduced concept of God touched on above. Theodore Bender has some pertinent words here:

“Whenever man regards God as someone he has found and is able to manipulate, appease, or cajole, man loses the capacity for worship. A Christian awareness of God’s grace always includes a deep appreciation of God’s greatness. We know of nothing that can so quickly dry up the fountainheads of praise, thanksgiving, and adoration in the heart of man than the glib twaddle about a God reduced by crude anthropomorphisms or false intimacies. Here, to our mind, we get secularization of religion at its worst...We do not need the cheap expression
which reduces God to the buddy upstairs, which puts Christian experience on the lowest plane, and which acknowledges little relationship to the inspired word of God.”

To be fair, we need to note that most CCM artists do not set out to be deliberately irreverent. However reverence is not purely in the eye of the beholder. Reverence needs to be defined first of all objectively in terms of what God requires in His Word. Just because people feel reverent does not mean they are being reverent. We need to define reverence by turning to the places in the Bible where men met God face to face (Isa 6, Eccl 5:1-4, Job 42:1-6, Rev 1:17). We need to define reverence by studying the way in which men in the Bible spoke about and to God.

Some people may object at this point that I do not really understand the genre of contemporary music. The lyrics are supposed to be cryptic, because that is the way this kind of music speaks. That may be, but is it a fit mode then in which to try to communicate truth? Perhaps there is something wrong with this type of music if it can not bear a theologically accurate and clear message.

Still others have said that you need to reach down to people where they are at, and speak to the man on the street in his own way. A.W. Tozer again has fitting words to diagnose the problem and to suggest the cure.

“The argument is sometimes advanced that the Christian faith can be made acceptable to the common people only by expressing it in the cultural and aesthetic idiom of the man on the street. This error has been used to justify the rambunctious jollification that passes for true religion in many places…

When Christ came down to earth He was received gladly by the common people, and the quality of His ministry to them is revealed in the gospels. Every word, every act was simple, sincere, and dignified. He never felt He had to become light to be understood.

The whole New Testament breathes the same spirit. The apostles never descended to the people; they so preached to bring the people up to Christian standards. Paul sewed tents to pay expenses, but he never clowned around to draw crowds.

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58 Bibliotheca Sacra, July 1960, pg 226, 228.
He became all things to all men but he never lost the serious, deep earnest tone from his message and deportment.”

We should not bring God down to our level, but rather raise people up in response to His greatness.

The problem though is not just that a great many of the lyrics are vague, unclear, or simplistic. There is a great deal of theological error and even heresy that is taught in them. CCM abounds with Pentecostalism, Arminianism, Catholicism, and a host of other errors. The entire theological spectrum in the North American church scene is reflected, including liberalism and Unitarianism.

Do you know what the artists you may be listening to believe? Do you critically evaluate their lyrics to see if the doctrine in them is Biblical? Do you refuse to listen to songs that promote false doctrine?

Let me give some concrete examples. Steve Green is associated with Pentecostal churches, as are many CCM artists. He has put their ‘latter rain theology’ into several of his songs. Latter rain theology is the conviction that there will be a particular type of revival in the end of times, before Christ comes back. This revival will include the return of the special gifts of the Spirit such as speaking in tongues, and the visible Church will be united as charismatic churches. Steve Green’s album ‘The Faithful’ (1998) includes two songs promoting this error: ‘The River,’ and ‘The Great Revival.’

Rich Mullins was taking the final steps to enter the Roman Catholic Church at his death in 1997. He attended mass weekly. The night before his death, he spoke with priest Matt McGuinness. Matt describes the conversation as follows: “There was a sense of urgency. He told me, ‘this may sound strange, but I have to receive the body and blood of Christ.’ I told him, ‘that doesn’t sound strange at all. That sounds wonderful.’ Rich finally sounded like he was at peace with his decision.”

Rich Mullins deliberately chose the Catholic Church, knowing its doctrines. He portrayed some of its false teachings in his songs. His popular song ‘Screen Door’ refers to the relationship between faith and works, from a Catholic perspective. “Faith without works baby /

60 Cf Q & A 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism.
61 Written by Terry Mattingly, ‘Rich Mullins – Enigmatic, Restless, Catholic.’ www.gospelcom.net/tmattingly/col.05.06.98.html.
it just ain’t happenin’ / one is your left hand / one is your right / It’ll take two strong arms / to hold on tight.”

He goes on to compare faith without works to a screen door on a submarine.

Another thing to be noted is the broad ecumenical spirit in the movement. Now of course there have been too many divisions in the Church, and we ought to promote the unity of the visible Church to the utmost of our ability. It should grieve every believer that the Church is as splintered as it is. Yet this can not be an excuse to tolerate false doctrine. There can be no unity unless it is unity in terms of the truth.

Several examples can be given of the ecumenical movement, with its effects. Kathy Triccoli, another Catholic singer, has an ecumenical theme for her 1997 album ‘Love One Another.’ The title song involved a group of well-known artists joining in (including Michael Card, Sandi Patty, M.W. Smith, Carmen, and others). The problem here is not that these artists are willing to associate with each other, or to reach out a hand to each other, but that they are willing to promote unity at the expense of truth.

Glen Kaiser of Rez band writes that the Church at large has much more in common than it has differences, unless we major in the minors. 99% of Christians believe the same basic Bible doctrines. Susan Stein, executive for Heartbeat Records, has said that she would “like Protestants and Catholics to set aside what are basically petty differences,” and she wanted evangelicals to “be a little less judgmental and a bit more open to understanding.”

The primary explanation for statements such as these is theological illiteracy and ignorance. The way of salvation presented in the Catholic Church is a different gospel, and a false gospel. Their teachings have not changed since the days of the reformation, when the Reformers stood up so strongly at the cost of their lives.

We need to notice the striking contrast between the lyrics of Christian music composed at the time of the reformation and many of the lyrics written today. At the time of the reformation, Martin Luther was instrumental in restoring music to the common people. He reintroduced congregational singing in the worship services, composing many hymns himself. He wrote these hymns not only for worship, but also for daily lives of his people.

The reformed view of music is that it is one of the ways in which the word of Christ is to dwell in us richly. In a letter to

62 {Copyright}
63 CCM Update May 27, 1996.
Spalatinus, Luther wrote: “Our plan is to follow the example of the prophets and ancient fathers of the Church, and to compose psalms for the people in the vernacular, that is, spiritual songs, so that the Word of God may be among the people also in the form of music.” This accounts for the substantial doctrinal contents of many reformation songs.

This also accounts for the great care that was taken to ensure that the songs circulating among Christians were in fact filled with the word of God, not with error or a vague message. The power of music is that it unites the heart with the mind, or emotion with the mind, producing a powerful impact on our senses. It allows us to remember much easier than if we only read or spoke the same words. This is a tremendous gift from God. However, like any sharp tool, it can be used to destroy as well as to build up. This led the Reformers to pay close attention to the lyrics of their music. It also meant that the musicians of the church were expected to have some theological training so that they could write lyrics that were biblical.

This is a feature conspicuous for its absence in the CCM industry. Almost all of the artists carry out their work with little or no theological training at all. They often begin a career because they have good voices, or other musical talents, rather than because they have the necessary level of biblical knowledge. They also think that their musical abilities include the license to preach, without any oversight or supervision from the church. In doing so, they overlook the great impact of their shallow and unsound music and teaching on their listeners.

The impact of new music at the time of the Reformation was so great that some said it was as important a factor in spreading the Reformation as the printing press. “A Jesuit named Conzenius is known to have remarked that Luther persuaded more people with his hymns than with his sermons.”

This way of thinking about music is taught in the Scriptures. Colossians 3:16 states “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” Notice here that one of the ways in which the word of Christ is to dwell in us is through songs that teach and admonish us. Compare this to Ephesians 5:19-20: “Be filled with the Spirit; speaking to

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64 Luther’s Works, IL:68.
65 P.J. Janson, ‘A Reason to Sing,’ Reformation & Revival, Fall 1995, pg 18.
yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”

There is a close connection between being filled with the Spirit, filled with the Word, and singing. The three are to go together. The Spirit works by means of the Word. We are filled with the Spirit when the word dwells in us richly. The way in which this comes out is in songs that demonstrate that we are filled with the words of Christ. Music is teaching, in another form. Or to use the academic terms, music is by its nature didactic because of its influence over our memories.

CCM music represents a shift in thinking about the role and impact of lyrics. It is not didactic, but experientially centered. This is a great loss in the meaning and purpose of music. The loss is this: recognizing that teaching and Biblical experience are closely tied together. Doctrine is meant to produce, direct, undergird, and preserve authentic religious experience. Genuine spiritual experience flows out of understanding doctrine, even when it is understood with simple words.

How often the apostle Paul moves from theology to doxology. This is true doxology: a grasp of God and His work which produces overwhelming awe which must be expressed in praise and glorying in God. It is awe because of who God is, as He reveals Himself in the Word and applies this knowledge by the power of the Holy Spirit. Understanding the nature of God is the fountain from which deep religious experience springs.

Music is a tremendous gift from God with which to express the deeps of experience. However when our music aims to pump up and produce experience directly rather than indirectly through proclaiming truth, it results in radical failure to achieve depth. Theology applied to the heart is the only producer of Biblical Christian experience, worship, and praise.

When examined in light of the Biblical and Reformed view of music as briefly outlined above, CCM lyrics are sadly lacking. Big deal someone says. We are not listening to this stuff to learn our doctrine, but simply to be entertained. We need to have something that we can listen to relax, or just to enjoy. But it is not so simple as that. You will be impacted by the music you listen to. You are what you listen to. What people sing is an indication of the direction in which they are headed. What comes out of your mouth is an indication of what lives in your heart, also with regard to song.
When we think that the music we listen to does not impact our thinking and living, we underestimate the power of music. There are two famous sayings that capture the power of music. “Let me write the songs of a nation, and I care not who writes its laws.” “More heresy has been sung into the church than taught into the church.” Why do people say things like this? Because of the tremendous way in which music affects memory and thought. I seriously doubt that anyone will be humming lines from this journal after reading it. But you will hum songs and words from the music you hear, even if you don’t like the song. What an illustration of the power of music!

Because music is didactic by nature, the songs you listen to are your teachers whether you realize it or not. The lyrics of the songs you hear will shape and inform how you think about God. You will use their words in prayer. You will remember them when you grow older and forget other things. You will remember their way of expressing things long after you forget sermons you hear, or catechism lessons you learn from the Bible. We would never allow most CCM artists to teach their views from our pulpits. Why then do we allow their teachings to reach us in our bedrooms and cars where we hear them more often than preaching, and when we remember their words better than we do the words of a sermon or good book?

Listening to shallow and even erroneous doctrine in music is a big deal because it impacts character. It has serious consequences for spiritual life. This is no insignificant or trivial matter. Throw out shallow songs, and fill your mind with music that fills your mind with the word of God.

Some defend the lyrics of the CCM movement by pointing to their sincerity. There is no mistaking the sincerity of many involved, both then and today. Many of the musicians see their work as a means of reaching the lost. Many will leave aside blocks of time in their concert where they do not sing but instead exhort the crowd about the scriptures.

For example, at a recent Michael Card concert in Grand Rapids during the Easter season, about ¼ of the concert was devoted to explaining various scripture passages dealing with the suffering and death of Christ. It was well-done, and for the most part good theology.66

There is a sense of urgency to the music of some, for they

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66 An exception to the work of most artists, though even with Michael Card there are things to be concerned about.
believe that there is a lost world to reach and many are dying without
the gospel. Regardless of what needs to be said by way of evaluation
about the music itself, and about the method they use to bring the
gospel, this sincere desire to reach the lost is commendable.

However sincerity is not the test of what is good or right. Just
because people are sincere does not mean that they will succeed in
doing what they intend to do. Sincerity does not guarantee that the
end result will be worthwhile.

Some will argue in response that the Lord has seen fit to use
CCM concerts to convert people, and to minister to others. Therefore
we should not judge them, but leave the Lord to work. The Lord gave
water from the rock when Moses struck it as well, even though he was
disobedient. The fact that God overrules to bring about His purposes
in spite of sin does not justify reducing His gospel. It is still a serious
matter for which men will be called to give an account (I Cor 3:11-15).

Some have asked whether or not this music could be used to
evangelize people from the world. The problem is that the gospel is
missing from most CCM. It will not serve the purpose. The Lord is
pleased to work through His Word. We could better give people
something that brings the message of His Word. Why give a thirsty
person muddy water when the pure water of the gospel is available?

I have painted a bleak picture of CCM lyrics in these pages.
Are there no exceptions to this problem? There are. It would be
neither fair nor accurate to ignore the good songs. I have found songs
that are biblical and well-written. However they are by far the
exception. To find them you have to wade through a great deal that is
not acceptable. What I have written is not a description of some fringe
problems in the movement. It is a theological corruption right at the
heart of things.

On the basis of this section alone, 90% of CCM can be
dismissed as unsuitable for Christian people.

67 Several years ago while in college, there was a class discussion about Petra.
One of the students had witnessed an interview earlier that day of Bob Hartman,
the general manager of the group Petra. When asked about the purpose of his
group, he replied with tears running down his face that many were dying without
the gospel, and ‘someone’s got to tell them.’ Such obvious sincerity can be noted
among other singers in the movement. Sincerity however has never been the test
of truth, and does not negate the need for sober reflection and evaluation. It also
does not make up for the absence of a clear biblical message in many of the songs
Petra sings.
The Music Itself

A third area that needs particular attention when CCM is analyzed is the music itself. When we evaluate music, we are making aesthetic judgements. Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy dealing with questions of the good, the true, and the beautiful. Just because it is a branch of philosophy though does not mean that it is something only professional critics or philosophers engage in. Every time we try to discern whether or not something is beautiful, we are making aesthetic judgements. It is impossible not to make them. When you walk through your neighborhood and decide that your flower garden looks better that the garden of your neighbor, you are making an aesthetic judgement. When you decide that you like a certain song, but not another one, you are making an aesthetic value judgement.

It needs to be noted that aesthetic judgements are not exactly the same as questions of personal taste. To say it differently, there is both an objective and subjective side to making an aesthetic judgement. The subjective side has to do with our own preferences. There is also an objective side to aesthetics. There are objective standards by which we can determine what is beautiful, just as there are objective standards for determining what is good or what is true. These standards are found in the word of God. Though it is true that determining and applying these standards in aesthetics can be difficult, that does not mean that they do not exist.

The world in which we live denies that there are objective standards for making such judgements when it comes to the arts, and in particular when it comes to music. It is said that beauty is purely in the eye of the beholder. In other words, value judgements have only to do with the subjective side of aesthetics, or with personal preference and taste. The academic name for this idea is relativism. Relativism is the notion that there are no objective standards for what is good, true or beautiful. There is no such thing as objective truth, and there is no such thing as objective good. Questions of morality and truth are to be determined solely by the individual. We are each responsible to create our own reality.

The moral relativism of our time extends not just to questions of morality and truth, but also to questions of beauty. It leads critics to say that personal taste is king when it comes to evaluating music and the arts. There are no objective standards by which to determine whether one piece or genre of music is better or worse than another.

To make all of this practical, the result is that a relativist
responds to a critique of the music he likes by saying ‘that’s your opinion.’ These three words mark the end of the discussion as far as he is concerned, and mean that he has no obligation to consider whether the arguments presented are factual or not. Since everyone is free to create their own reality and truth, this one liner is the relativist’s answer to those who attempt to set forth objective standards, either in the arena of morality, of truth, or of aesthetics.

There is some truth to this, because every aesthetic judgement has a subjective or personal side to it. But there is also a grave mistake here that is not compatible with a Biblical worldview: the assumption that there are no objective standards. This is aesthetic relativism, and relativism of any sort is patently anti-biblical.

Though many Christians realize that relativism is not an option, they have attempted to say the same thing in a sanitized way by abusing the biblical doctrine of Christian liberty. They have reinterpreted the Biblical teaching to reflect modern relativism and subjectivism. The result is that whenever anyone else presents a view of art, music, or other ethical and aesthetic issues that differs from theirs, or requires them to change their own standards, they brush off what is said by claiming they have the Christian liberty to go their own way.

This is a misunderstanding of Christian liberty. The biblical teaching is not the license for each believer to pursue his own tastes and ideas independently. To say it another way, the doctrine of Christian liberty does not allow me to be a law unto myself when it comes to questions of how to live. The biblical teaching of Christian liberty is that the Christian is free from the opinions and ideas of men, and not bound to man-made traditions. He is free from sin and the dominion of Satan as expressed in the way of life of the world.

However it does not stop here. When the Bible declares that a Christian is free from the opinions of men, it does so in order to bind him to the commandments of the Lord. This freedom consists not only in being delivered from the sinful way of life of the world, but it means being delivered unto obedience to the word of God, and to the commands of Christ. This freedom has a goal: it delivers us from the opinions of men so that we might be entirely free to have every part of life molded and informed by the word of God. In other words, Christian liberty is not the freedom to do what we want, but the freedom to do what we ought, as determined by the word of God. We are most free when we are most bound by the word of God (Cf John
When we fail to grasp this second aspect, we fail to understand Christian liberty. When someone presents a biblical argument about what is right or wrong, and we refuse to carefully consider it with the excuse that we have Christian liberty, we actually abandon the exercise of our Christian liberty at that point.

To get back to the question of aesthetics more directly, it is important to realize that the church in the past has held that there are objective standards for beauty, and for music and the arts. The modern position is the newcomer on the scene. For example, Jonathan Edwards argues that the source of beauty is God Himself. Beauty is a reflection of the character and ways of God. It is one of the ways in which God reveals Himself in creation. Therefore what we call beautiful in the arts and music says a great deal to the watching world about what we think of God’s character and attributes.\(^\text{68}\)

The shift from focusing on the objective to the subjective was led by philosopher Immanuel Kant. He wrote a book called *Critique of Judgement* (1790) in which he said that an object was beautiful only if it produced the right feelings in the audience. In practice this meant that people began focusing on their own response to a piece of music rather than on objective criteria such as proportion, unity, and clarity. The feelings a piece stirred in the listener became the focus of aesthetic judgements rather than beginning with the way in which the work itself was crafted, and how it expressed its message.\(^\text{69}\) It was a shift that ultimately led to the aesthetic subjectivism and relativism that plagues contemporary thought.

The objective to subjective shift has impacted the church, so that many Christians think this way without even realizing it. This is why it was necessary to write the last few pages, so that we approach the subject of the music used by CCM artists thinking biblically instead of imitating our godless culture. This involves developing an aesthetic that brings the objective and subjective sides together. We need to redefine the word taste to reflect the balance between the two.

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\(^{68}\) Note the essay of Jonathan Edwards On the Nature of True Virtue (Works I:122-142). John Mason Hodges has written a more simple and helpful summary of this view in the Reformation & Revival Journal, Fall 1995, pgs 65-78. He also has a helpful presentation of the relationship between the objective and the subjective sides of making an aesthetic evaluation of a piece of music. This essay is highly recommended to the reader.

\(^{69}\) Reformation & Revival, Fall 1995, pg 68, 72.
Taste in contemporary terms has come to mean personal preference. However Miriam-Webster dictionary defines taste as ‘the power or practice of discerning or enjoying whatever constitutes excellence, especially in the fine arts.’ J.I. Packer defines taste in biblical terms as “a facet of wisdom; it is the ability to distinguish what has value from what does not.”

These pages are a plea for Christians to begin to exercise discernment when it comes to music itself, whatever style it may be. Most believers pay no attention to aesthetic judgements, but simply give way to what is happening in the world around them or else nurture their own likes and dislikes, and their own traditions, and leave criticism to whoever cares to do it. We are not exercising discernment when we do this, and that is simply not an option if we want to think and live in a Christian manner (I Thess 5:21-22). In the words of Denis D. Haack, “What is needed, obviously, is for believers – both musicians and nonmusicians – to be discerning in music.”

Having considered what we are actually doing when we make aesthetic value judgements about music, we can now begin to analyze the music itself. This is a difficult task because of the broad variety that exists within the CCM industry, but there are general statements that can be made.

We need to begin by noting that the moral neutrality of all music is a foundational principle on which the movement is built. This is a direct result of what was said above about the Kantian shift to subjective aesthetics. If the value of a piece of music is to be determined by the results it produces rather than by whether or not it meets certain objective criteria, then by the nature of the case there can be no such thing as a style of music that is not appropriate. If someone somewhere likes it, that is enough.

Note the following quotes. “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all music was created equal, that no instrument or style of music is in itself evil – that diversity of musical expression which flows forth from man is but one evidence of the boundless creativity of our Heavenly Father.” In other words, no critique is possible. There are no objective standards we can apply to a genre or style of music as a whole. According to this conviction, it is impossible to create or corrupt a style of music to the point that it could no longer be called

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70 Ibid, pgs 73-74.
71 Ibid, pg 91.
72 CCM Magazine, November 1988, pg 12.
beautiful. In other words, there are not even objective standards in the character of God that apply here.

In response to the charge that no instrument or style of music is itself evil, it is true that an instrument is made of materials that are in themselves neither good nor evil. But that still does not legitimate everything produced by that instrument. “Just as vowels and consonants can become blasphemy, and pen and paper in the hand of an artist can become pornography, so notes and rhythm, in the hands of a composer or artist, can become sensual” or can convey other inappropriate desires.  

John Styll writes: “There is no such thing as Christian music. That’s because all kinds of music are capable of expressing Christian thought. It’s not the music that’s Christian, it’s the lyrics.” In other words, the music itself does not have an identifiable message on its own. It is neutral, and has no meaning apart from the words or intentions that accompany it. Any message is created in the mind of the hearer, and is not found in the music itself.

Bebe Winans states: “We believe all music comes from God, and that liberates us to express ourselves in a wider range of artistic expression than some others.” Here God Himself is credited as the source of every kind of music. This means that any musical style whatsoever, including acid rock and house-music, has to be and is defended by the CCM movement as a legitimate vehicle for communicating God’s truth. By implication anyone who wishes to dispute this is reducing the ‘boundless’ creativity of God, and impugning one of His gifts. This is a very convenient claim, but one that has not been thought through and will not stand up to closer scrutiny.

This all sounds so broad minded and profound on the surface,

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74 John Styll, founder and editor of CCM Magazine, June 1991, p.22
75 Note the lyrics of several songs to this effect. The group Petra sings the song *God gave Rock and Roll*: “God gave rock and roll to you / Put it in the soul of every one / If you love the sound / Then don’t forget the source.” Larry Norman, ‘the father of CCM,’ wrote the popular song “Don’t Let the Devil have all the Good Music.” {Copyright}
77 “There is nothing un- or anti- Christian about any kind of music” (Best [dean of the conservatory of music at Wheaton College] in “Through the Eyes of Faith,” p 52, cited in Cloud pg 21).
but in reality it is shallow. It actually short-circuits discernment, and any conviction that does this can not be accurate. God’s call to discern does not end when we enter the aesthetic realm.

Music is the best of God’s remaining gifts in the natural world. Are we to suppose that Satan would consider this gift hallowed ground? Would he leave it alone out of respect for God? Sin has distorted every single one of the gifts of God in one way or another. The order that marks God’s creation has been turned into disorder at every turn. This has also occurred with music. Let me demonstrate this with a series of concrete arguments.

The conviction that music is neutral and does not carry any message is simply not true. Again this conviction is relatively new if we examine history. Note the words of Aristotle: “music directly represents the passions or states of the soul…if a person habitually listens to the kind of music that rouses ignoble passions, his whole character will be shaped to an ignoble form.”

This is the consistent testimony of history, from both secular and Christian thinkers. The idea that music has meaning and a message apart from lyrics is still asserted by most secular singers and thinkers today. The primary advocates of the idea that music is neutral seem to be CCM fans and artists. This raises the question, why do they argue this way? Part of the reason may be that the church has been very reluctant and slow to accept rock music in its various forms (though this opposition has faded to some degree over the years), and they are trying to legitimate their work. CCM artists are attempting to respond to the constant charge over the years that the message rock music carries within itself is not compatible with a Christian worldview. In the end, whatever the cause, the argument does not hold any water.

Music has a message. Music is emotional communication. There is no such thing as music that has no message or meaning. Since men as moral creatures are the ones producing music, this means that the message expressed in music must be moral as well. This message does not derive purely from association, or from the words that accompany the sound. It is something inherent within the arrangement of the notes themselves.

Some further examples are in order. The Hallelujah Chorus from Handel’s Messiah would sound ridiculous if it were put to music

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like ‘Mary had a little lamb.’ Why? – because the message of the words and the message of the music would contradict each other. Music has a message that the lyrics can not drown out!

When David played to soothe the mood of King Saul while he was oppressed with a spirit, not just any music would do. He had to choose melodies that would soothe rather than make the problem worse. Large department stores spend enormous amounts of money studying what mood various kinds of music put their customers in, so they can chose the kind that makes them most likely to spend more. At one point films were produced without sound because the producers were unable to match a soundtrack to their pictures. Theatres would hire a pianist to sit beneath the screen and play music that would match what they saw happening on the screen at the moment. They could do this because music has a message and can communicate mood by sound even when there are no words.

To put the same thing in more academic terms:
“Music is a language that is designed to communicate to and affect the emotional and psychological faculties of human beings. Therefore, instead of relaying cognitive information, music speaks to us in terms of common feelings, moods, and emotions…in short the work of art may be said to have a specific feeling property when it has features that human beings have when they feel the same or similar emotions or mood. This is the bridge between musical qualities and human qualities, which explains how music can possess properties that are literally possessed only by sentient beings.”

The same article deals with I Corinthians 14:7-11 at length in order to demonstrate scripturally that music itself is a language that communicates like the spoken word.

“It should be clear then that Paul’s analogous use of music with spoken language shows that he considered music to be a language in its own right, able to communicate to the emotions as words do to the mind. This evidence from the Scripture lobbies against the possibility of music being morally neutral. Since I Cor 14:7-11 shows that music is a language in itself, capable of communicating to the feelings, emotions, and moods of moral beings, and since not all feelings, emotions,

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and moods are good, it is only reasonable to conclude that music has the power to communicate evil.”

Since music has a message, what message does the music of CCM carry? In order to get at the message, we need first to make an objective assessment of the way in which rock music makes its impact. To repeat what was said earlier, on a purely musical level, rock music emerged as a synthesis of rhythm & blues, pop, and country western music. Though the music developed in various directions and subgenres as reflected in the CCM industry today, the dominant feature of all of it is a powerful incessant beat. The result of this is that the rhythm dominates the music to such an extent that the melody, harmony, and lyrics assume a secondary place in the overall effect of the music on the listener. Unlike many other forms of music, rock music as a style makes its primary impact through its dominant beat.

Secular historian Carl Belz notes: “For the total folk function of rock, the rhythm of the music has always had as much meaning as its subject matter, for it has given the subject matter a real immediacy.” William Schafer writes: “There is no separation of form and content in rock, since they are fused as a continuous experience, a package of simultaneous impressions and feelings.”

Simon Frith, a liberal sociologist, rock analyst, and devotee of modern music, describes the way in which rock is a medium that dominates and overwhelms the verbal message attached to it. “Sociologists of popular music have always fallen for the easy terms of lyrical analysis. Such a word-based approach is not helpful at getting at the meaning of rock...most rock records make their impact

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80 Ibid, pg 18.
82 Belz 30-31. Belz later on notes: “the market offered music for every type of taste. But nearly all of the new material possessed the beat of rock. Rock’s ability to maintain this beat, while changing superficially to absorb new influences, enabled it to grow…” (Belz 60).
83 Dr. Frank Garlock on pgs 67-68 of *Music in the Balance* notes that while 3-4 percent of a classical orchestra was responsible for rhythm, the sound coming from the typical rock group is 75 percent rhythm (Greenville SC, Majesty Music, 1973).
84 Belz 33.
musically rather than lyrically. The words, if they are noticed at all, are absorbed after the music has made its mark. The crucial variables are the sound and rhythm.”

What is the result when the rhythm dominates the music this way? Everyone who has heard rock music will agree that it has a great deal of energy. All music has energy, but this music bombards its listeners with a particular kind of energy. Rock music dominates and overwhelms the listener in a way that other music does not. Nik Cohn writes “what was new about it [rock] was its aggression, its sexuality, its sheer noise; and most of this came from the beat.” This energy is raw, blatant, noisy, emotional, bombastic, and unrestrained.

This brings us to another question – why was this kind of music developed at this particular time in history? What is the message that this raw and energetic form of music was shaped to convey? In 1971 *Rolling Stone* editor Jann Wenner outlined why his magazine is dedicated to music by explaining the significance of rock music in recent cultural development.

“*Rolling Stone* was founded and continues to operate in the belief that rock ‘n’ roll music is the energy center for all sorts of changes revolving rapidly around us: social, political, cultural, however you want to describe them. The fact is for many of us who’ve grown up since World War II, rock’ n’ roll provided the first revolutionary insight into who we are and where we are at in this country: our first discovery that behind the plasticized myth of what we had been told was the United States, behind that Eisenhower-Walt Disney-Doris Day façade was a real America: funky, violent, deeply divided, despairing, exultant…”

Rock represents and gives expression to a complete rejection and rebellion against traditional values and meaning in life. It is a deliberate rejection of the Christian worldview, and the adoption of a new worldview and way of life. This Cultural Revolution proclaimed that God is dead, and life makes no sense. It is chaos, undisciplined and meaningless. The standards, order, and way of life of the old culture are deliberately left behind in favor of the new. The new in

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88 Cited and referenced in Myers, pg 138.
this case means complete moral and cultural relativism, and the rejection of all objective standards for truth, morality, and the arts. Cultural analyst H.R. Rookmaaker writes “Each line and each beat [is] full of the angry insult to all western values.”

John MacArthur, in his commentary on Ephesians 5:19 comes to the same conclusions:

“The pulsating rhythms of native African music mimics the restless, superstitious passions of their culture and religion. The music of the Orient is dissonant and unresolved, going from nowhere to nowhere, with no beginning and no end – just as their religions go from cycle to cycle in endless repetitions of meaningless existence. Their music, like their destiny, is without resolution. The music of much of the western world is the music of seduction and suggestiveness, a musical counterpart of the immoral, lustful society that produces, sings, and enjoys it.

Rock music, with its bombastic atonality and dissonance is the musical mirror of the hopeless, standardless, purposeless philosophy that rejects both God and reason and floats without orientation in a sea of relativity and unrestrained self-expression. The music has no logical progression because it comes from a philosophy that renounces reason. It violates the spirit, because its philosophy violates truth and goodness. And it violates God, because its philosophy violates all authority outside of self.

Not only the titles and lyrics of many rock songs but the names of many rock groups shamelessly flaunt a godless, immoral, and often demonic orientation. The association of hard rock with violence, blasphemy, sadomasochism, sexual immorality and perversion, alcohol and drugs, and Eastern mysticism and the occult are not accidental. They are fed from the same ungodly stream. A leading rock singer once said, ‘Rock has always been the devil’s music. It lets in the baser elements.’ Another testified, ‘I find myself evil. I believe in the devil as much as God. You can use either to get things done.’ Putting a Christian message in such a musical form does not elevate the form but degrades the message to the level already established in the culture by that form.”

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90 John MacArthur, commentary on Ephesians 5:19, pgs 260-261.
In order to understand more clearly what this means, we need to take a closer look at how the Cultural Revolution developed in the first place, and what its roots are. Doing this demonstrates what is involved in the cultural shift, and how this is expressed in rock music.

The roots of popular culture today go back in part to the movement in philosophy known as Romanticism. Romanticism was a reaction to the rationalism of another movement called the Enlightenment. Enlightenment thinkers taught that creation could be comprehended by reason, and the scientific method. They made man and his mind the measure of all things. The Romantics objected to the rationalism of the Enlightenment. They rightly concluded that creation could not be comprehended by reason. There are limits to the abilities of the human mind, and there are mysteries in the universe that we can not comprehend as finite creatures (which is not the same as saying life is irrational, or that reason is not important).

However the romantics over-reacted to rationalism with a strong sense of the primacy of the irrational in life. Romanticism stressed instinct and feeling, rather than reflection and thought. They thought that people should freely express their passions and desires, rather than restraining and guiding their feelings through reason. Life and religion were reordered in terms of feeling rather than in terms of truth, in terms of instinct rather than in terms of principle.91

It is no surprise then that Romanticism celebrated youth and the primitive. Children and primitive cultures act on instinct rather than by reflection. This meant that the Romantics thought the most primitive forms of human culture are superior because they have not been shackled by convention and reason. The commitment to unrestrained self-expression led them to prefer “authenticity over artifice, expression over classical restraint, invention over imitation, the natural over the civilized, the intuitive over the rational, the raw over the refined.”92

The influence of Romanticism on popular culture today has led to two recurring problems: immaturity, and narcissism (being preoccupied with yourself and your own experiences). This is reflected in the lyrics of rock, and in the way the music is usually

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91 Myers, pg 139-141.
experienced. “Rock lyrics are suffused with the language of emotion: need, want, and feel are the building blocks of its abstract vocabulary. Logic and reason are everywhere associated with the loss of youth and the death of vitality.”93 “Not only do rock lyrics denigrate reason, but the way rock is usually experienced discourages any kind of careful reflection.”94 Sadly these remarks apply to most CCM as well.

Some object to this assessment by claiming that other kinds of music can act as a distraction too. It is true of course that any kind of music can distract a person from serious reflection, but it does not necessarily need to do so. The unique thing about rock music is that it overwhelms the listener with its expressions of raw and unrestrained energy, so that it becomes a distraction itself rather than just a potential distraction. In doing so it submerges the mind beneath surges of feeling.

There is another aspect to the worldview producing rock and CCM music that needs to be discussed at this point. The Cultural Revolution also embraced complete moral and aesthetic relativism. There is no truth, good, or beauty that is absolute. It embraced the conviction that there is no meaning to life. There is no one to whom we are responsible. There is only meaninglessness, and whatever reality there is we must create ourselves.

This worldview leads to despair, restless boredom, and spiritual emptiness.95 There are two ways to relieve this problem. The first is to find meaning and fulfillment in objective truth, which gives meaning and purpose to life. The second way, which has been chosen by our popular culture, is diversion. When you can not cure the problem of meaninglessness with objective truth, the best you can do is to distract people from the emptiness of their lives. This means you need constant diversion and titillation, in order to distract people from the meaninglessness of life, and to numb the pain that comes from this way of life. It means artificial excitement, emotional manipulation.

This attempt though is unsuccessful in the end. “If there is a fundamental lack of fulfillment in our lives, a pall of tedium hangs over everything we do. Diversion, however frantic, can overwhelm temporarily but not ultimately relieve the boredom which oozes from nonfulfillment.”96 “Diversion at most, through weariness and fatigue.

93 Myers, pg 149, quoting Robert Pattison.
94 Myers, pg 149.
95 This is why philosophy like that of Nietsche rises out of this worldview.
96 Myers, pg 62, quoting Earnest Van den Haag.
can numb and distract anxiety.”  

In medical terms, it is like administering a painkiller without trying to cure the cause of the pain. It means that repeated doses of painkiller are needed, so that when one dose wears off, the next can take its place.

There are several ways in which our culture works to distract us from the painful reality that this worldview has brought upon us. One way is by a constant quest for excitement and pleasure. Since there are no moral norms anymore, this excitement is sought by arousing the desires people have. This can be very addictive, but it also obscures reflection on the eternal realities and claims of God. It has a strongly negative effect on developing maturity and depth of character. Another way is instant gratification. Everything has to produce excitement immediately, so that the despair that meaninglessness brings can’t rise to the foreground.

Here is where rock music comes into play. We have already seen that rock music is the energy center of the Cultural Revolution. It was shaped and enhanced not within the boundaries of the conviction that life has objective meaning, order, and beauty, but in order to function as distraction, and to gratify the constant need of the people for excitement. Rock music makes its impact with raw and unrestrained energy, overwhelming the hearer and keeping him from the pain of reflecting on the meaninglessness of his situation. It is a stimulant for the desires and passions of the heart.

One of the results of the ‘painkiller’ function of rock is that by the nature of the case it needs to become stronger and stronger to have the same effect because after a while the same dose does not work as well anymore. This has led secular rock into a continuous downward spiral into the bizarre, the perverted, and the extreme. It has led into heavier and heavier styles of rock such as acid rock, and heavy metal.

The sad thing is that the same progression is evident in CCM. Those who began with mild rock are progressing to harder rock. An illustration of this is Sandi Patty. Her 1993 album LeVoyage rocks so heavily that CCM Magazine stated “…old-line Patty fans are either going to be seeking refunds in droves, or be so flabbergasted at seeing an entirely new side of her…” Dc Talk decided to ‘push the envelope’ in their new Jesus Freak video: “the intention of the clip was to ‘push the envelope’ of the Christian music community…they expect

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97 Meyers, pg 63.
98 Myers, pg 67.
some of the more conservative members of the Christian community to frown on the adventurous clip.”¹⁰⁰ The same progression is evident in the music of Twila Paris. Some of her older songs are beautiful renditions of classical hymns, but her newer work is progressing in a heavier direction musically and weakening lyrically.

Rock music functions like a musical drug. It produces a tremendous amount of energy. This is partly due to its dominant overwhelming beat. Medical studies have been done demonstrating the effects of this on listeners. The effects are the same, regardless of whether one likes the music or not. When rhythm exceeds the average heart rate, the brain is put into a state of stress that increases as the rhythm becomes more predominant. This can be measured in ‘driving’ brainwave activity. To force down this activity, the body releases natural opioids. These natural chemicals are similar to drugs like morphine, and are used to control the body’s sensitivity to pain. This response can lead to positive arousal and become addictive. After a while, one needs the release of those opioids to feel good again. There is also considerable evidence that rock generates some degree of sexual arousal by the same process. The body responds to high sensory stimulation by releasing gonadotrophins as well as opioids. The result of this combination is often aggression.¹⁰¹

Another factor in the drug-like effect of rock is its sheer volume. Concerts are at about 120 dB. This means temporary hearing damage takes place in less than fifteen minutes. Repeated exposure results in permanent hearing damage. Why is rock so loud? Noise prevents the listener from concentrating on or thinking about anything else. Further loud noise brings an adrenaline rush. Raymond Hetu, audiologist at the University of Montreal, writes “The vibrating beat of the music brings on a state of arousal…It’s like amphetamines. Its acoustic speed that makes people feel good.”¹⁰²

Rock fits the worldview of the Cultural Revolution completely. This is no surprise since the culture and music of a people reflects their values and way of life. Rock produces continuous excitement. It gratifies instantly. It also exalts the irrational,

unrestrained, and vulgar because it was shaped by those who reject all standards for truth, beauty, and morality. It works by arousing desires and passions. Rock is a musical stimulant or drug that becomes stronger depending on the amount of beat and noise involved.

It is noteworthy that the desires aroused by rock music could probably better be described in biblical terms as ‘the desires of the flesh.’ “One of the more obvious outlets for rock’s energy is sex. This theme is a very familiar one, and is the staple of Christian criticism of rock.”103 The association between sex and rock has been made innumerable times by critics, devotees, and medical professionals, both secular and Christian. The term ‘rock n’ roll’ was first applied to the new music in 1951 by Cleveland disk jockey Alan Freed. It was a ghetto term referring to fornication in the back seat of a car.104 Rock musicians regularly connect their music to sex. For example, consult the magazine Melody Maker, March 9, 1988: “From our viewpoint it’s impossible to ignore the correlation between music and sex because, being so incredibly rhythmic as it is, it’s very deeply correlated to sex.” Alan Bloom wrote a thought-provoking chapter on music in The Closing of the American Mind in which he elaborates on this claim. When Elvis Presley began dancing to his music “in a raucous and sexy manner,” parents and authorities reacted strongly. His fans went crazy: “To his enthusiastic audience, Presley’s spontaneous dancing was a visual counterpart to the feelings which his singing inspired.”105

Other outlets for the energy of rock include sexual dancing, violence and vandalism after concerts, drugs, alcohol abuse, and Eastern mysticism.

CCM advocates take strong exception to the above critique. They argue that outlets for the energy of rock depend entirely on the hearer, and that the music is neutral. Though one listener might respond to this energy with wrong desires, another can respond with right desires such as worship and praise to God, or simple enjoyment. They usually cite their own motives and experience as an example.

They have overlooked the character of rock, as well as its impact on the listener. The music itself carries a message that will drown out your best intentions. It carries a message that overwhelms the words, the melody, and everything else. It carries a message that

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103 Myers, 151.
104 Cloud, 120.
105 Belz, 44.
contradicts nearly every point of the Christian worldview. Your sincerity will be drowned out by the message the medium of rock expresses. It is the nature of the music to do this!

A musical style is capable of some flexibility, in that it can express a variety of moods. But this flexibility is not unlimited. “Anyone wishing to communicate through a form or style that employs this philosophy must also use its distinctive components. Because genres are generally limited in purpose and characteristics, those who employ them are also limited by the same.” May a Christian use a medium that demands allegiance to absurdity, nihilism, chaos, and self-gratification in order to communicate the gospel? The answer must be no. Punk and metal are extreme forms of this philosophy, but their less volatile cousins are not exempt from this charge either.106

The intentions of the music are stronger than the intentions of the listener, or of the lyrics. Dave de Boer uses a helpful analogy to demonstrate this. You can communicate in several ways. One of these ways is the spoken word, and another is the gestures and expressions that accompany these words. If you tell you mother her cooking smells delicious, but at the same time wrinkle up your face into an expression of nausea and distaste, she will not believe you. The expression on your face robs your words of their intent by displaying the opposite intent. Your mom can choose to ignore the expression, but then she is deceiving herself.

Music works the same way, in that it communicates by word and by sound. Music is supposed to complement the intent of the lyrics, but this does not mean it gets its meaning only from the lyrics. You can mix music and lyrics that contradict each other.107 The lyrics may be pure and wonderful, but at the same time the music is shouting out that the world does not make sense, and that the only meaning in life is to pursue your passions without restraint. The music preaches chaos, and unrestrained self-expression.

‘Now hold on’ some argue. ‘That is not our intention in listening to this music. We just want to use it glorify God, to enjoy it, and to express the Christian faith in a relevant and modern way.’ That may be, but the music itself carries a message that will drown out your best intentions. It stimulates the listener from the perspective of its anti-biblical worldview, regardless of that person’s intentions.

Because rock music makes its impact primarily through a dominant rhythm, the message and impact of the music drown out the words and intentions of the person involved.

To make this more concrete, we need to realize that rock music has a subtle impact on the character of those who listen to it. We will misunderstand this impact if we consider it purely in terms of sinful social behavior such as illicit sex, violence, or drug abuse. Not everyone who listens to rock will go out and engage in such behavior. However we would miss the point if we then concluded that there is no connection between the peculiar energy of rock and such actions. Ken Myers has some insightful words in this regard:

“While these are legitimate concerns [concerns about sinful behavior when analyzing art], what should attract more attention is the effect of consistent exposure to popular culture, whether or not the content is objectionable, on the development of internal dispositions. The habits of mind, heart and soul – in short the qualities of character – that are encouraged or discouraged by the aesthetic dynamics of our cultural activities are at least as important to Christian reflection on culture as are social considerations. After all, we believe that a person does what a person is, not the other way around – that who we are inside is ultimately more significant than who we are outside.”

This is a Biblical concept. What we do reveals who we are, and what is in our hearts (Matt 7:16, 20). The fruit is evidence of what the root is. To apply the concept to this discussion, rock music impacts character in a way that leads to the fruits listed above.

It was stated above that the raw energy of rock music expresses the postmodern worldview of complete relativism, and consequently of complete selfishness. This necessitates the pursuit of excitement for its own sake, to serve as a distraction for the lack of meaning in life. When our emotions are aroused simply for excitement sake, or without an objective basis in truth, that arousal is emotional manipulation and a drug. It pumps up the listener with an emotional cheat rather than uniting feeling and truth as music was created to do. Leonard Payton, a Christian musician, writes: “CCM is famous for its manipulation of the emotions. Indeed, virtually nobody analyzes CCM, or, for that matter, any pop/rock music, from an

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108 Myers, pg 76.
aesthetic perspective. There is simply nothing but emotional engineering there to analyze."  

What impact does this have on character? The rock aesthetic promotes focussing on self and the present. It makes personal experience the arbiter of all things. It makes the individual the creator of his own reality, and makes the momentary fleeting feeling of well-being the thing which he pursues. It is an addictive distraction. The problem is that this distraction not only serves to turn men’s attention from meaninglessness, but from meaning itself as well. This makes rock unable to serve as a medium for communicating meaning, and ultimately for communicating truth in a way that is consistent with a Christian view of life.

The rock aesthetic is a serious obstacle to developing a sense of the transcendent realities of the Bible. It makes one earthly minded rather than heavenly minded. It sets your affections on things below, not on things above. This mindset is diametrically opposed to the Biblical mindset (Col 3:1-3).

“Biblical Christianity teaches that the self is not self-defining. We are all created in the image of God, whether or not we want to be. We all stand in judgement before a holy God, whether or not we want to. We have all been given certain natural abilities, opportunities, frustrations, and liabilities by a sovereign God. We do not, as many would have us believe, ‘create our own reality.’ There is one reality, ordered by the one God. We are answerable to Him for our conduct within that reality. Our cultural life should encourage us to acknowledge that reality and its center in Jesus Christ, not in our self.”

At the very best, rock’s dynamics produce a self-centered focus that is not Biblical. It produces a spirit of restlessness, which is an obstacle to prayer, to thinking Biblically about self-denial, to thinking at all, and to being attentive to the needs of others. At worst, the mindset encouraged by rock leads to unrestrained self-expression in the most bizarre and perverted forms. This is the connection to sex, drugs, etc so often documented by those who study rock music. This connection

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109 Reformation & Revival, Fall 1995, pg 113.
110 Myers, pg 64.
111 Myers, pg 101.
is no surprise when we consider how rock stimulates the sinful human heart and its desires.

The mindset stirred and nurtured by rock is also in direct contradiction to the repeated biblical commands to be sober minded. Being sober minded means being self-controlled in light of the eternal realities of the Bible. It means living life not for self-gratification, but instead by principle, truth, and the commands of God. Cf Rom 12:3, I Thes 5:5-8, I Tim 3:2,11, Titus 1:8, 2:2,4,6,12, I Pet 1:13, 4:7, 5:8.

By now it ought to be obvious that rock music is not a suitable medium for communicating the gospel evangelistically. It is also not suitable for worship, because it contradicts the transcendent mindset that is an essential part of worship and praise, and of holiness in any setting. Rock music stands in flat contradiction to nearly every point of the Christian worldview.

This has serious implications for casual listening as well. Rock is not suitable for just relaxing either, because of the impact of the music on character. This impact is the same no matter what the lyrics say. The impact is the same even when there are no lyrics at all. In the final analysis, rock music is not consistent with a Christian worldview at all.

The nature of rock has contributed to the other problems of the CCM movement cited in this critique. The whole ethos of rock is entertainment oriented, not worship oriented. The music itself demands simplistic emotionally oriented lyrics. Since this ethos rises from the rebellion of our current culture to the values of an older culture that was at least partly informed by a Christian world view, it is not surprising that CCM artists end up having a problem with worldliness (cf below).

But rock is just cultural some argue. That’s the whole point! It is the expression of a decaying and bankrupt culture that is clearly opposed to a Biblical view of life. Our culture is a sinking ship because it has rejected objective truth. Why would anyone want to stay aboard? Why would anyone want to adopt the artistic fruit of this society to express the truths of a Christian view of life when the two contradict each other?

Arguing that it is just cultural and therefore neutral or permissible is relativism. I say this in full awareness of and appreciation for the tremendous diversity that exists around the world when it comes to music and the arts. I grew up on the mission field, where they played drums and other native instruments in the worship
services (with different dynamics than rock!). Just because there is diversity in this world does not mean all cultures are equal or on the same level. Some cultures reflect greater or lesser influence by a Christian worldview, so that it is possible to analyze them as better or worse. It is possible to speak of cultural advance or decline as a society adopts or rejects truth. Such discernment is required when there is eternal truth to which all cultures must conform.

Some advocate CCM because they think it demonstrates to the watching world that Christians can have fun too. Why do we expect and crave the approval of our culture? Let’s not forget that we are involved in a spiritual war between two kingdoms. The culture in which we live plainly belongs to the kingdom of darkness, because the influence of a Christian view of life is shrinking rapidly. Why do we want the approval of the servants of darkness? What they call fun is often another name for self-gratification. That is different than the Christian privilege of joy in the Lord, flowing from peace with God. This obviously does not mean that Christians ought to be a morose and gloomy people. Christians have the only true reason for joy in the world, and this should be reflected in all that we do. However this joy needs to be expressed first of all in terms of what the Bible teaches, rather than to impress the world.

Contrary to what the world thinks, the Christian is not against pleasure. God is the author of pleasure. At His right hand are pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:11, 36:8). Calvin and the Puritans, in obedience to scripture, taught that true holiness does not make our pleasures less, but raises them to their highest level. The man who is holy, who obeys God, knows greater pleasures than the sinful world can ever know (Deut 5:29, 6:34). True pleasure and happiness come from glorifying God.

When we try to focus on happiness or pleasure for its own sake, we subordinate what has been created to the Creator. We end up placing more value on our enjoyment than on God’s honor. Besides being idolatry, this very act takes the heart out of the true experience of pleasure. It cheapens pleasure by reducing it to a quick thrill, while leaving you at center unsatisfied because God has been left out of the picture. God has so ordered this universe that centering on Him and serving Him raises every faculty and pleasure to their highest pitch. Rock music directly contradicts this focus.

Others advocate or at least accept rock because they are aware that the church has been embarrassingly narrow-minded over the
centuries in accepting certain new discoveries and changes. For example, the first person to sing parts in a church was excommunicated. The Copernican revolution was resisted because the Catholic Church thought that the sun rotated around the earth, rather than the other way around. The danger with realizing this is that we react by becoming too broadminded, so that we accept everything new without attempting to discern.

Whenever we see the faults of others, we are in danger of a very subtle form of spiritual pride. This pride leads us to think we are too intelligent to do the same thing. The danger is that while we are busy congratulating ourselves on keeping out of the ditch of having a closed mind, we fall into the pit of having a mind that is too open.

There is a difference between rejecting a scientific discovery such as the fact that the earth rotates around the sun, and rejecting rock music. The former was an advance in knowledge. The latter is the production of a culture in serious and widespread decay. Therefore resisting it is not resisting advance, but refusing to go along with a great decline. Some argue that the world has changed in North America, and that we need to accept this change and go along with it. It has indeed, and not for the better. No, we don’t need to go along with it. We may not go along with it.

Closely related to the temptation to be too broadminded with respect to cultural changes is the way in which the concerns of others are dismissed. Parents are often hesitant to voice their objections because they are dismissed as being old fashioned. CCM advocates will say, “parents just don’t like anything new,” implying that their concerns are only the result of irrational fear. That is a dirty tactic. It trivializes the legitimate concerns they may have. It is a subtle form of emotional manipulation, for no one wants to be out of step with progress. Though the older generation may not always be in step when it comes to technological advance, their wisdom and life experience are not to be ignored when dealing with questions of musical discernment (Lev 19:32, Prov 1:8-9).

There is one final question that needs to be answered in this section. This critique of rock music has been quite broad and general in nature. How are we to apply it in particular to a musical scene as diverse as CCM? Admittedly we are dealing with questions of degree when we ask how much rhythm in a song makes it incompatible with a Christian worldview. Some CCM artists release cd’s that feature a singer accompanying himself on a guitar as he sings some of the
classic hymns of the faith. Others are so bombastic that even seasoned critics can not make heads or tails out of the lyrics or melody. We are obviously dealing with a spectrum here, meaning that a cut and dried rule is impossible to articulate.

The principle is that the rhythm of a song may not dominate a song at the expense of the lyrics, melody, or harmony.

The great majority of CCM features a predominate rhythm that falls under the critique outlined above. As with all questions of degree, we must be careful not to flirt with the edges of what is permissible, but to be committed to music that is clearly consistent with a Biblical worldview. This is particularly important when it comes to CCM, since rock artists and listeners tend to progress towards heavier music.

The church father Augustine has shown us the way when it comes to responding to music that makes its impact subjectively: “When it happens to me that the song moves me more than the thing which is sung, I confess that I have sinned blamefully and then prefer not to hear the singer.”

**Worldliness**

Our attempt to discern with regard to CCM also needs to lead us to reflect on the way in which those in the industry go about their work. This has been touched on already indirectly, but now we need to focus on it directly. There is a significant problem with worldliness among CCM artists and industry insiders. Again I will make my point not by quoting critics, but by letting the words and actions of the artists speak for themselves.

There seems to be a fascination with doing things like the world, and with deliberately imitating the world in a wide range of ways. Note this remark by singer Rick Altizer: “I think Christian Music suffers because Christian people by nature are afraid of the world.” I did not realize this fear was a ‘problem!’ The Bible speaks of such fear as commendable and as an essential mark in those who want to be Christians (James 4:4).

From the very beginning CCM has been copying the world’s way of doing things. There is a periodical “Christian Musical Comparison Guide” which is designed to help people find music

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which sounds like their favorite secular groups. It was first published by Paul Baker. The forward to the guide states “It’s been interesting to watch just how closely the Christian music industry has begun to mimic its secular counterpart.”¹¹³ For example, those who like Judas Priest are told to listen to Resurrection Band. Those who listen to Led Zeppelin are told to try Twin Sister.

Ken Meyers writes about the comparison guide:
“The disturbing thing here is that performers seem at times to achieve popularity because they sound like secular originals who are not quite kosher because they write dirty lyrics or bite the heads off of rodents or exhibit severe gender confusion in their wardrobes. It’s disturbing because it seems as if the ‘good guys’ are working very hard to measure up to the standards already set by the ‘bad guys’…More subtly, achieving popularity by ‘sounding like’ establishes a curious pattern for people striving to avoid being conformed to the pattern of this world. The implicit message of such celebrity is that Christians are successful to the extent that they mimic the models established by the world.”¹¹⁴

Phil Driscoll writes that a lot of what happens in the CCM industry is “so much like the world that you can’t tell the difference.”¹¹⁵

A closer look at how this worldliness manifests itself is in order. First, worldliness is evident in the way in which singers have become entertainment stars. Michael Card notes that the industry used to be song driven. The songs had a longer life, and people used to recognize an artist secondarily as the one who composed the songs they had already heard. “Now the industry is celebrity driven. The song is almost irrelevant. The focus is on the person, and songs have become disposable.”¹¹⁶

The performers come to concerts dressed in the same immodest clothing as their secular counterparts. For example, I recently saw a picture of Britney Spears and Leigh Nash of Sixpence None the Richer (a CCM group) standing together at the Grammy

¹¹⁴ Meyers, pgs 19-21.
¹¹⁵ Charisma, November 1993.
Awards. Britney Spears was dressed immodestly like most rock stars with a tight revealing blouse. The sad thing was that you could not tell who was the secular singer and who was the CCM artist by looking at the picture.

Many CCM artists also act like their secular counterparts, with the same glitzy and egotistical behavior. There are stars, popularity charts, and fan clubs. There is dancing, moshing, and shrieking at concerts. One Dallas newspaper compared a DC Talk concert to the Beatles as far as audience response is concerned.\footnote{Dallas Morning News, April 27, 1996. Cited in Cloud, 129.} Inside Music magazine recently describe the star status of Michel W. Smith. “His concerts draw hundreds of thousands of fans each year, mostly teenage girls who scream their affection for him nonstop throughout…to his fans, Smith is the absolute greatest there is, bar none…”\footnote{Inside Music, Jan/Feb 1991. Cited in Cloud, pg. 129.}

Some will respond by saying that the artists can not be held responsible for everything their audience does. That is true, but they can work to discourage this sort of thing far more than they do. Many do nothing at all to change this sort of thing. Why would you allow someone to make an idol of you without trying to stop it?

Another problem is inappropriate language. An article in a Christian magazine tried to justify this kind of behavior: “For Christians to flatly dismiss musicians because they use four letter words or sexual references, diminishes the likelihood that people will ever hear our message…We have to understand the world’s view before we can effectively communicate our view; we have to relate to the people before we can preach to them.”\footnote{Moody Monthly, July-August 1994, pg. 57.} It is certainly our calling to understand the world in which we live so that we can learn how to proclaim the gospel. However this never includes participating in the sins of the world. That is conforming to the world rather than being holy. Being all things to all men is not a license to sin. The Biblical standard for those who want to proclaim the truth publicly is that they should be blameless.

The fascination of CCM artists with the world of secular rock is another serious problem. At an interview after receiving a Dove Award, Ashley Cleveland was asked about her favorite music and movies. She responded by listing several secular groups notable for their profane lyrics, and also mentioned a movie in which a group of
unemployed men decided to become male strippers. She got a kick out of imagining her husband and friends acting like that.

Many CCM artists openly admit that they regularly listen to secular rock of all kinds, and get inspiration for their work from some of the most profane, violent, and blasphemous groups out there. The secular contemporary music scene is perverted and debauched to an extreme degree, and yet CCM artists go here to get inspiration, and to find music for enjoyment.

What ever happened to hating sin, and loving righteousness? What about Psalm 119:136 “Rivers of waters run down mine eyes because they keep not thy law.” Sin is never funny. Scripture is very plain about the evil of being conformed to the world. It stresses in a number of ways the necessity for those who call themselves Christians to be transformed, and to be different. Note texts like I John 2:15-17, James 4:4-5, Romans 12:1-2, Gal 6:14, Eph 5:11, Titus 2:12, James 1:27, I Peter 1:14-17, I John 5:19, 2 Corinthians 6:14, and Leviticus 10:10.

There is no excuse for this kind of behavior. It is an abomination in the sight of the Lord.

To be fair and accurate in our evaluation, it needs to be stressed that not everyone in the movement is guilty of this sin. There are artists who do not do these things, and who are notable among their contemporaries for the purity of their lives and speech. Yet worldliness is a serious problem among CCM artists. Again this is not a fringe problem among a few artists, but it is widespread.

Where do we go from here?

Clinging to what is Good

This critique has been largely negative, due to the way things are in the CCM industry. However it would not be right to end on a negative note for several reasons. First, music is a tremendous gift from the Lord that is to be celebrated and cultivated to His glory. The critique launched at rock and at CCM in this paper must not diminish this conviction in any way. Music is one of the best remaining gifts from the Lord that we have after the fall. It is so great a blessing that we may not speak of it without ending with thanksgiving to God for giving us such a gift.
Second, we need to avoid a pitfall that well-meaning conservative Christians often fall into when criticizing the culture of the world. We need to avoid expressing the radical difference in values and way of life that there is between the world and the people of God purely in terms of the negative. That would mean only pointing out the poverty of their decaying productions in light of the view of the world that God gives in His word. When we do this, we will be involved with music and the arts only to censure them.

That would be a tragic reduction of our calling in this world. The Bible calls us to sing to the Lord, and to make music that honors Him since He is the creator of music. Since obedience to the Word of God requires song, the question is not whether or not we will produce art and music, but whether or not it will reflect the order and truth of God accurately. We are called to produce music that demonstrates to the watching world the beauty and depth of the culture produced by a Biblical worldview. In doing so we will declare what we think about the character of God Himself. What we call beautiful says a great deal to the watching world about what we think of the God who has given objective standards of beauty and order in His Word.

Finally, we need to end on a positive note because our calling to discern in light of I Thessalonians 5:21-22 has both a negative and positive side. We are told to abstain from every appearance of evil, and to cling to what is good. This section of the paper is a brief attempt to foster clinging to what is good when it comes to music.

One of the ways in which this can be done is by having qualified people among us use their gifts to produce and promote good music. The Christian is called to cultivate all of the gifts God gives Him, in order that they might be used for His glory. We have not received musical talents in order to bury them in the ground. God has gifted some of you when it comes to playing music. Will you put those talents to work in composing good music as well?

This would go a long way to countering the negative influence of movements such as CCM. There is a historical precedent for the effect positive music has in displacing what is not acceptable. At the time of the Reformation, there was a man named Thomas Muntzer who led a liturgical reform movement. Though he focused on Christ in his lyrics, he drew attention to the exemplary character of His life at the expense of focusing on His cross. Luther fought these errors not by posting more theses on the church door, but by writing new songs that dealt with the death of Christ. These songs effectively replaced
the songs produced by Munster. Those among us with musical
talents need to join with others who have the ability to write lyrics that
are theologically accurate, in order to counter the effects of CCM and
any other music that contradicts a Christian view of life.

There are others working with the same vision. For example,
Faith Presbyterian Church in Tacoma, Washington, hosts an annual
symposium called “Church Music at a Crossroads.” I have listened to
the tapes of the 1999 conference, and found helpful material in them
for those who are interested in answering this challenge.

As we think about writing good music, Scripture itself
contains rich guidance. The pattern for Christian lyrics is found in the
Psalms. God has seen fit to give us an inspired songbook that functions
for both the Old and New Testament Church. This songbook has been
given for the church to use in its worship. This songbook also
functions as the model for all of the music that the Christian sings or
enjoys.

The Psalms teach us the rich variety of song that should be
offered to God. The Psalms include praise, lament, sorrow for sin,
hunger for God, and love for the law of God. The entire range of
human emotion and experience is captured here, as is the whole
counsel of God.

The Psalms also teach us how to craft good music. Dr. Robert
Godfrey has some pertinent words explaining this:

“The Psalms also model for us the substance of our singing. A
few Psalms are short and have repetitive elements, but most
are full, rich, profound responses to God and His work.
Singing praise to God, the Psalter reminds us, is not just
emotional expression, but a real engagement of the mind.
Songs that are very repetitive or shallow and sentimental do
not follow the model of the Psalter. The command to love
God with all our mind must inform our singing. Mind and

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120 *Reformation & Revival*, Fall 1995, pg 25-6. Calvin had an even better idea: he
led the Reformed church back to the Psalms.
121 It involves men like Dr. Terry Yount, Ken Myers, and Michael Horton. I do
not agree with everything said and done at this conference, and yet their insights
and work are helpful. They are focussing on writing new music for worship, but
the principles and ideas that they have apply to music of all kinds.
122 This is not the place to defend the principle of exclusive Psalmody in worship,
though I do hold to it Those who are interested in the subject should consult
Michael Bushell’s excellent book *The Songs of Zion* (Pittsburgh, PN: Crown &
emotions together are the model of praise presented to us in the Psalms.”

A very good case can be made for the conviction that the Psalms should form the core as well as the model of the songs we sing in all parts of life. The Psalms are the only inspired songs that the church on earth will ever have. That by itself decides the place they should hold in our lives. We do not pay enough attention as Free Reformed young people to the Psalms when it comes to singing and listening to music in our meetings, at camp, in the home, in the car, or when enjoying the company of our friends. James 5:13 tells us: “Is any merry? Let him sing psalms.” Singing Psalms is a biblically commanded way of expressing joy. They are not just given for the worship of the church, but for the daily life of the individual Christian.

John Calvin saw the significance of the Psalms clearly at the time of the Reformation. His response to the heretical lyrics of his day was not to write new hymns like Luther, but to introduce the Psalms in congregation worship and family life. It became a common thing to walk the streets and hear Reformed families singing Psalms together. This response is even better than Luther’s response, for it involves letting the word of Christ dwell richly in us through God’s own inspired songs. When we write lyrics, the danger of teaching error is always present. This danger is never there in the Psalms.

This does not mean that the only music we may enjoy is worship music. If you study the use of music in the Bible, you will find that it is used in nearly every context imaginable. It is used in war, in feasting, in times of sorrow, in weddings, in worship, and by individuals such as David in the fields. We may craft and enjoy a rich variety of music to match the variety of life.

Yet you will also find that each time the music either fosters and expresses covenant obedience, or covenant rebellion. Therefore we need to be sure that the music we listen to is consistent with the view of life and the world presented in the Bible. This is true with respect to the lyrics, and to the music itself. Though a song need not necessarily use the name of God, it will say something about life in the world created by God. What it says must be true, good, and beautiful, as God defines these three. Even the way in which the reality of evil

and sin is acknowledged can be consistent with truth, or contrary to truth. We can confess it, or flaunt it.

There are two things in particular that need to be avoided as we enjoy and compose music. First we need to avoid imitating the world. This means setting our standards from the Bible, rather than looking for the approval of the world. It means consciously beginning with a Christian view of life rather than trying to sanitize the things produced based on the world’s view of life. That is like putting a Christian veneer over things, a veneer that is often very thin. The result of ‘redeeming by veneer’ is that the world ends up redeeming what we do rather than we what it does. This is where CCM falls flat on its face.

We can avoid imitating the world by producing music based on the objective truths of the word of God. This will be music that transcends the decay that marks a sinful world, and draws our attention to the transcendent realities of God and grace. Another important aspect of Christian music is that it should be composed, performed, and enjoyed with a pilgrim mindset that looks to another city, whose builder and maker is God (Heb 11:13-16).

Second, we need to avoid fossilizing, and expending our cultural energy only in order to preserve the productions of the past. The reaction to the cultural decline of our day has led some conservative people into what one musician laments as the ‘decomposing composer phenomenon.’ This is the idea that all good composition ended with the classical period, and that contemporary artists can only produce mediocre work at best. That is not true. We are free to use the gifts that the Lord gives to compose new music, and new styles of music, as long as they are consistent with the Christian view of life.

However refraining from fossilizing when it comes to music does not mean that we are to ignore what was accomplished in the past. We are heirs to a rich history of music in our western culture that was written from the perspective that life makes sense, and has order and meaning. We should not only enjoy this music, but also use it to make our own music in the 20th century.

Let us not buy into the arrogance of our culture with its constant quest for the new, and its contempt for the old. Culture and

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specifically music that expresses the values and way of life of a people must by definition include a storehouse of great material from the past that sets a standard for the new. This in the past gave stability, permanence, and a foundation to the efforts of musicians. Our popular music culture today examines the same material and dismisses it as stagnant stuff, the dusty leftovers of a way of life that has been replaced in the modern world.

From a Christian perspective, the opposite is true. Our culture is in marked decay and decline, and this is reflected in the culture and music that is produced today. There is a great deal of music from the past that is superior to what we have today because it was produced from the perspective that life has meaning, and that there are objective standards for what is good, true, and beautiful. This of course does not mean that we are to suspend discernment when it comes to older music.

Principles for Discernment

The following principles have been drawn from Scripture to assist Christians in choosing music that glorifies God. It will be put into a more concrete form in the next section.

1) **The Christian must sing** (ex Psalm 98:1, 100:2, 147:1 and many others). Song is a mark of being filled with the Spirit of God (Eph 5:18-19).

2) **Song exists for the supreme purpose of glorifying God** (Psalm 145:1-5, 150:1-2). The most common occasion for song in the Bible is to praise God for His wondrous works in creation, providence, and redemption. It has also been given like all things for us richly to enjoy (I Tim 6:17). However the enjoyment of it must glorify Him. Song glorifies God when it reflects the orderliness of His character, proclaims His truth accurately, and tends to holiness.

3) **Christian song must be filled with scripture.** Colossians 3:16 says that the mark of the word dwelling richly in a believer is song. Note the tie to Ephesians 5:18-19. A spirit-filled Christian is a word-filled Christian. This means the lyrics of our songs must be filled with scripture, and must be filled with the doctrines of scripture. They must also be doctrinally accurate. This means that
they must not only use biblical words, but also explain them correctly. Our songs must be balanced. They may not proclaim one aspect of truth at the expense of another, but the whole council of God must be reflected in them collectively. Song must include teaching and admonition (Col 3:16), speaking about God’s character (Psalm 101:1), adoration of His works in nature and salvation (Ps 98:1, 96:1, Rev 5:9), of the law of God (Ps 119:54), giving of thanks (Eph 5:19-20, Ps 95:1-2), praise (Ps 92:1), confession of sin (Ps 51), hunger for God (Ps 42), and joy (Ps 149:5). Every aspect of Christian experience needs to be addressed, as well as every aspect of truth.

4) **Christian song must be distinct from the world.** Scripture repeatedly emphasizes that there is a radical difference between the world with its values, and God’s church. Col 3:5-17, Eph 4:17-5:12, Phil 4:8, Titus 3:1-8. We are not allowed to be conformed to the world, but must be transformed by the renewing of our mind (Rom 12:1-2, James 4:4, I John 2:15-17, 5:19, I Tim 4:1-4). Scripture uses the word ‘new’ in relation to song more than to any other word. The song of the people of God is a new song, distinct from the world. This world is not a playground, but a battleground where there is enmity between God’s cause and Satan’s cause. This will display itself in the words of our songs. Even songs which are not explicitly about salvation must represent life as anchored in the fear of the Lord, and may not contradict a Christian worldview. This will also be reflected in the music itself. When a style of music is developed to give expression to the philosophy and depravity of the world, it is no longer fit for Christians. Negatively this means Christian song must avoid even the appearance of evil. I Thess 5:22-23, Phil 4:8, Rom 12:9b. Our songs must reflect holiness and purity. This means that we do not try to get as close as possible to the world, but that we are zealous to maintain purity and a clear separation even from the appearance of evil.

5) **Christian song must be a witness to the world.** The church is a light set on a hill, and therefore everything a Christian does is to be a witness (Matt 5:13-16). The believer is to walk as a child of light in a dark world. This means being separate and holy.
6) Christian song may include diversity of style. Psalm 150 shows us that various instruments are to be used. There is legitimate cultural difference between various groups in musical style, as long as the first 5 principles are kept in mind. There is room for personal taste, as long as the song is objectively in accord with the principles of scripture.
A Model for Discernment

This section is an attempt to put the principles outlined above need to be put into a practical form so that they can be used in evaluating music. I am deeply indebted to John Mason Hodges and Dennis D. Haack for their insights into how to do this. They suggest a four-step process for evaluating a piece of music.

First, consider the message of the words and the music itself. Here the focus is on what the song is saying. The words must objectively reflect a view of the world that is consistent with the teachings of the Bible. This task is a little more challenging when considering the message of the music, but here we need to identify what the music itself is saying, and whether this is true, partly true, or false. Where the music itself deviates from the truth, how does this affect our ability to enjoy the song?

Second, consider the composition of the message. Here the focus is on how the piece communicates its message. In other words, the focus is not on the truthfulness of the message, but on the craft and excellence with which that message is expressed. Are the words well crafted as poetry? The words may be true, but are they expressed well? Truth can be expressed poorly so that the message comes across poorly. This does a disservice to the truth that the artist is attempting to express. Conversely false ideas can sound good when they are expressed in well-written lyrics, leading the thoughtless to adopt them unthinkingly. Assess the creativity of the work and appropriateness of the form the words take.

Dennis Haack lists a humorous example of what happens when a poem is poorly composed. “There’s an old hymn called ‘Even Me’ which speaks of ‘showers of blessing’ – fine in itself – but one of the lines reads, ‘Let some droppings fall on me.’ It’s hard to sing that...

126 Those who are interested should read the article “A Practical Guide to Discernment in Contemporary Music” in the Fall 1995 issue of Reformation & Revival Journal, pgs 91-103. This section of the paper leans heavily on their work. Another helpful model can be found in Calvin Jones’ excellent article ‘The Biblical View of Music,’ in Chalcedon Report, August 1999.

127 Dennis Haack writes: “The form makes a difference...the words of some praise songs, for example, are unimaginative and limited, and as a result have to depend on mantra-like repetition to have the desired effect. They might not be untrue, per se, but the writer, either through lack of talent or effort, was satisfied with a poorly composed poem.” Ibid, pg 99.
without thinking of birds flying overhead.” Other examples of poorly worded songs are much more serious.

When examining the composition of the music, the concern is “whether the music is well crafted, and whether the form fits the words.” The composition and the words need to compliment each other. For example, an amusing light-hearted tune can not be used to meditate on the sufferings of Christ. The music must evoke a mood that expresses what the words are conveying. The music needs to evoke that mood in a natural way, not by artificial manipulation of our emotions.

Third, consider the quality of the performance of the piece in question. Does the performance complement the words and the music? For example, “a showy and light-hearted rendition of a great hymn merits criticism even if the performer is a believer.”

Fourth, consider your own taste. Personal enjoyment is part of the experience of music, and it is important. This is the most subjective of the four steps, but even it is not purely subjective. The reason is that taste can develop and mature over time, and that even taste has an objective side as well (cf above, the beginning of the section on The Music Itself).

Help for Those who Struggle

In conclusion, those who struggle when it comes to putting all of this into practice need some encouragement and help. I have a lot of sympathy for those who struggle with the appeal of rock music, whether secular or CCM. It’s considered an essential part of being American, or Canadian, and none of us like to be thought of as odd balls or cultural misfits. Part of the appeal of CCM is that it claims to offer a way to be a ‘normal’ teenager without having to abandon Christianity. According to one man, “CCM is part of a parallel Christian culture, enabling kids to be normal, blue-jean-wearing, music-loving American teenagers without abandoning their faith. In fact, it enables them to celebrate both their faith and their culture.”

The pressure is intense to be like our peers, not only in the world, but in the church at large.

The problem is that you can’t have it both ways. You can’t celebrate a culture that thrives on what is ungodly without being

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128 Ibid, pg 99.
affected by it, even if that is not what you intend. When you try to serve two masters, one or the other always gains the upper hand. The habits of the heart that CCM encourages are a very serious obstacle to developing maturity and depth of character.

To top it all off, rock music is very addictive because of the way in which it manipulates your mind and body. Once you get hooked on it, it can be very hard to change your habits, even though you might want to. Part of the problem is that you can’t escape from it in our culture. It is on the radio, in stores, in the mall, and nearly everywhere you go.

How can we overcome this temptation? A superficial or quick-fix answer will not help us here. We need to develop what the Bible calls wisdom. Wisdom in the Bible is much more than simply knowing the difference between what is excellent and true and what is not. Wisdom means being able to discern what is excellent, having the strength of character to cling to it, and to shun what is impure and unholy in God’s sight. One Puritan prayer expresses beautifully what we need: Lord grant me the ability to discern what is right, the determination of will to choose it, and the strength to carry it out.

How do we develop wisdom? The Bible tells us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Job 28:28, Prov 1:7), and also the way in which we grow in wisdom (Prov 15:33a). The fear of the Lord is that indescribable and indefinable mixture of trembling awe, and childlike trust. It is the gift of God Himself, through the work of His Spirit, by His Word, to those who sincerely ask and search for it in His word.

I can not say it any better than these passages from the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 1:1-8:

“1 The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; 2 To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; 3 To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity; 4 To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. 5 A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: 6 To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings. 7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction. 8 My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother:
Proverbs 2:1-11:

1 My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; 2 So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; 3 Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; 4 If thou sekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; 5 Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. 6 For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. 7 He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly. 8 He keepeth the paths of judgment, and preserveth the way of his saints. 9 Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea, every good path. 10 When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; 11 Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee.

Notice here what you need to use to get wisdom: your ears, heart, and voice. You need to incline your ear and listen to the Word, to apply your heart to learn, and to lift up your voice in prayer.

Proverbs 3:1-7:

“1 My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: 2 For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. 3 Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: 4 So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man. 5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. 6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. 7 Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil. 8 It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.”

But what about personal taste, which can make the struggle hard? Taste can change. Taste can mature, since it is part of wisdom. Taste is partly moral and objective, and therefore can be corrupted or improved. This is a foreign concept in our culture, because it has espoused moral and aesthetic relativism. That means that whatever
you feel or like at the moment is good. However the Biblical teaching is that our taste improves when we learn to enjoy what is admirable, rather than simply enjoying what pleasures us at the moment. Your taste will change and mature the more you learn Biblical wisdom. This is true in the moral realm when it comes to denying the old desires of the flesh, and learning to walk in new obedience. This is also true in the aesthetic realm, and in particular in the realm of music.

What do you do when your friends listen to rock or CCM while you are with them, and you seem to be the oddball? That can be a real challenge. Try to discuss it with them, or give them something to read that explains what you think. Try to find a friend that thinks like you do.

There are positive alternatives when it comes to music. There is good music that fits a Biblical worldview for every kind of occasion in life. It might take a little work to find, and some change in taste, but it can be done. Let us exercise discernment, and cultivate our tastes to match the Biblical view of life more and more. May the Lord help us to do so, by His Spirit and for His glory.

Soli Deo Gloria!