

## Newsletter November 2015

In this newsletter, we shall address the decline of true Christian worship within the temporal church with respect to both its centrality and quality. In doing so, we shall utilize excerpts taken from various chapters on Church History found in *Comprehensively Reformed Christianity* Book III. Services in today's temporal churches largely consists of worship music augmented by formal corporate prayers and Scripture recitation – particularly poetic texts of praise to God taken from the book of Psalms. However, in many churches worship is increasingly being diverted away from the person of God and his Christ and redirected toward the hedonistic applause and pleasure of mankind. In this newsletter we shall discuss worship music at some length. While the decline of Christian worship is most evident in the worsening quality of worship music, the underlying apostasy of the true faith by the temporal church that supports it goes much deeper – as we have demonstrated in many of our more recent newsletters beginning in October 2014.

In its simplest definition, music is “the art of combining and regulating sounds of varying pitch to produce compositions expressing various ideas and emotions.” (*Randomhouse College Dictionary*). The regulation of sounds also involves precise repetitive timing or rhythm. Assembled properly, music produces a pleasing effect or euphony to the ear. The ideas and emotions expressed through musical sounds alone are often nebulous, conveying various meanings to different listeners depending upon their personal tastes and state of mind at the time. Music can be created through the human voice or through the use of various musical instruments. It is only in connection with the human voice that words in the form of poetic lyrics can be added to better define the ideas and emotions that the music is intended to convey to the listener. Christian music is exclusively defined by its lyrics – not by its underlying music. Christian lyrics vary to express meaningful and worshipful praise of God and Christ, lamentation over our sin nature, or the joy of personal redemption. Nevertheless, musical tones and rhythm convey an underlying idea through human emotion that can either reinforce or conflict with those lyrics. In sound Christian music, the lyrics convey a direct Christian message to the mind, while the underlying music conveys a perceptible message to the emotion that is in precise accord with those lyrics. When that perceptible message conflicts with the lyrics, the combination becomes corrupted and is therefore unsuitable for use in true spiritual worship. In the case of intentional duplicity, such music can even become blasphemous.

In studying the origin and history of Christian music, we must begin with biblical texts. Psalms were commonly recited in Jewish Temple worship wherein Levite leaders would chant a “verse” and the attending congregation would in turn chant a “respond.” It cannot be assumed that later synagogue worship services varied greatly from that standard. Musical instruments of various sorts were frequently added to Old-Testament Psalms at the explicit direction of King David, although exactly how they were integrated into the text itself is not evident. The Hebrew word *Selah*, which is found within various Psalms, was an early form of notation apparently requiring a contemplative pause in the recitation of the text much as a musical rest is used today. This rest of unknown length may have been filled with a gentle instrumental interlude to aid in that contemplation. The many Psalms of David easily made the transition from Judaism to Christianity because of the common foundational belief in Jehovah God that Christianity shared with Judaism.

Other than the poetic monophonic chanting of Scriptural verses, there is no indication that very early church worship services included music in any advanced form. The first written chants as well as the cataloging of various other existing chants of the temporal church are attributable to Pope Gregory I, the Great, (cf. *CRC* Book III, page 179) who reigned over the Roman church in the late sixth and early seventh century. Only later would a simple melody be integrated into recitations and chants in support of the religious text, and it would be much later still before harmony and counterpoint would be employed. Some rudimentary form of music notations recorded on cuneiform tablets have been found back as far as 2000 BC, and musical notation that specified pitch and duration was being used by the ancient Greeks as early as the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. However, there is no sound evidence of any systematic method of written musical notation being utilized in the early church until perhaps as late as the fifth or sixth century, so that any melodic enhancement to the words of the Psalms or the hymns adapted from them were most likely being performed from a traditional memorized style – if at all.

Unlike Old-Testament Scripture, New-Testament texts make little reference to music being used in a formal congregational gathering. The Apostle Paul referred to “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual

songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ep. 5:19); but it is unlikely that he was referring in any way to liturgical music performed aloud within a formal church setting. In 1st Corinthians 14:15 Paul spoke of singing with the spirit as well as with the understanding, but what form this “singing” would have taken is problematic inasmuch as Paul is admonishing the Corinthians regarding their abuse of glossolalia in the context of this statement. In Hebrews 2:12, reference is made to Jesus Christ giving praise to God when the author uses the word “sing” in a form of poetic hyperbole such that we cannot directly infer anything about congregational singing from this verse (cf. Ps.22:22). We read in Mark 14:26 that the apostles had sung a hymn before they went out to accompany Jesus to the Mount of Olives prior to his crucifixion. That hymn was most likely a recitation of a Psalm of praise to God taken from the Old-Covenant “Book of Praises.” It is not known whether a simple memorized melodic line of varying pitch and duration could have accompanied it or not.

Those favoring the intrusion of the Emperor Constantine into church affairs, during the early fourth century Roman coup d'etat of Christendom, increasingly favored church aggrandizement. Colorful processions similar to Rome’s splendorous military victory parades were introduced into the church along with formal church choirs to further enhance their grandeur. It was only after the Roman political invasion of the church that worship music became polyphonic containing both harmony and counterpoint due in part to a previous injection of Greek and Syrian musical forms. Composers continued to experiment with church worship music making it increasingly more splendorous and complex. At some point, congregations found it impossible to participate in singing the difficult music, with the intended consequence that only highly accomplished singers could engage in active worship. Congregations became passive audiences – even as the liturgy of the Mass itself increasingly became a complex performance of conjuration conducted solely by Roman clergy. The words sung by these prodigious choirs became blurred within the intricate musical forms of advanced choral music as well as being further concealed within the Latin language. Any message that was supposedly intended as an offering of praise to God by the laity through clerical proxy was hidden from them in a sea of traditional complexity.

During the great Protestant Reformation movement (cf. *CRC Book III*, Chapter 18.1) and for a considerable time thereafter, Christian worship music continued on in the Roman style of formal choirs and complex musical forms. Formal music was exclusively written for performance within a church setting by some of the great composers of the age such as Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart. Many of their compositions were shared between the Roman Catholic Church and various emerging state-sponsored Protestant churches. In opposition to all of this exclusive musical complexity, other Christian lyrics were being written to which a popular folk melody was added – thus allowing the laity to directly participate in meaningful congregational singing. Most of these early lyrics were paraphrased from the Psalms and other biblical texts. Over time, however, the popular music of the street as well as folk music became identified with various unique lyrics such that these new compositions became identifiable as Christian music to large numbers of believers. This folk-music style is still evident in the worship services of many rural churches today in the form of country music containing simple Christian lyrics.

The Moravian church, founded by Jan Hus, flourished in Germany after a group of refugees found safe haven on the estate of Count Nicholas van Zinzendorf. Count Zinzendorf wrote copious amounts of poetry, such as *Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness*, which found its way into the worship music of the reformed church. Christian worship was further enriched by the many hymns that Charles Wesley wrote during his lifetime such as, *Love Divine, And Can it Be*, and *Oh for a Thousand Tongues*, among many others. Martin Luther, also wrote and arranged several hymns the best known of which is *A Mighty Fortress is our God*, based upon the forty-sixth Psalm. Many other composers such as Isaac Watts contributed greatly to a theologically rich repertoire of reformed Christian music. Nevertheless, a few older hymns, which have been sung for centuries within Protestant churches, contain lyrics that are tainted with Arminianism such that they do not properly conform with biblically sound reformed doctrine. For that reason, we occasionally find various words, phrases, and even entire verses omitted or changed in many contemporary hymnals. These changes often represent doctrinal improvements, but other changes made by devious religious liberals intentionally remove sound theological and doctrinal concepts. Contemporary music is being integrated into recent church hymnals replacing older standard hymns of much better quality. Sometimes the lyrics of older hymns are retained, but the melodies are transformed into less favorable contemporary musical forms. Consequently, choosing a theologically sound church hymnal suitable for worshipful congregational singing in today's sound conservative bible churches has become a challenging process.

Churches emerging out of the Protestant Reformation Movement continued the church-choir concept as a means of incorporating hymns with accomplished voices to enhance their church worship services. While some churches encouraged the congregation to sing along, the music increasingly became more complex and soon impossible for congregations to follow. This complexity again excluded the faithful from participating in active worship – much as did the elaborate performances of Roman choirs preceding them. Over time, great Protestant church choirs have fallen by the wayside as the necessary rehearsals increasingly became far too tedious and time-consuming. The few active singers that remained from this group became the basis for what is commonly referred to today as a “praise team,” which unfortunately tends to elevate the fame of a few performers through popular music styles. Armed with electronic amplification, the voices of the “praise team,” commonly accompanied by loud percussion, dominates the worship singing of the lay congregation. The faithful can barely be heard above the din – assuming that they attempt to sing along at all; many have been banished to sit in frustrated silence. While it is quite common to find words to contemporary music displayed on large display screens in today’s churches, many contemporary melodies are quite cumbersome for the congregation to follow in the absence of a musical score such as was printed in earlier church hymnals. In many churches hymnals are a thing of the past.

Not all contemporary Christian music is faulty, but it varies greatly in quality. Some compositions are quite sound in both lyrics and euphony, and for that reason they have properly found their way into modern hymnals used in the worship services of biblical churches. However, the vast majority of contemporary Christian music is fabricated from decadent worldly musical forms, and the highly emotional lyrics often lack any sound biblical basis. As the moral climate of a nation declines, its popular music becomes increasingly decadent. During the 1920’s and still later in the Beatnik era, jazz began to work its way into the popular music of the day, and quite naturally, that form was soon adopted as a basis for new Christian music. More degrading still was the Rock music of the decadent Hippie drug culture that also found its way into church music. All music arouses a mind-altering state that can be either beneficial to true worship or destructive and decadent. Rock music has at its very core the jungle rhythm of pagan moral decadence and the undertones of violence, which is an irritant to the human soul.

Worship services in many of today’s churches have become so overwhelmed with the loud hedonistic sounds of the current age that the church is often the place where the unsaved go to be entertained. While Christian music most certainly has its place when it is offered up by the faithful to glorify God in reverent worship, it ceases to become worship when it is performed exclusively for the delight and applause of a human audience. Contemporary congregations increasingly look upon the music of the church as a form of pleasurable entertainment sung by a popular soloist and/or praise team much as if they were attending a secular rock concert. Many churches actively promote the inference. To enhance the sensation of entertainment, some liberal temporal church lobbies are being equipped with snack and fast-food venues to fill the stomachs of their “worshippers” before and even during the worship service. So insidious is this entertainment concept that it is slowly finding its way into otherwise biblical conservative churches to appease the secular tastes of their younger members. In today’s contemporary church music, the lyrics and musical sounds do not remain in proper balance to act together in presenting a unified message consistent with Scripture – thus also introducing a corrupting influence upon church doctrine and practice. Today’s church worship music is most often a combination of theologically poor, highly repetitive, and emotional lyrics, drowned out by heavy drums added onto the instrumental sounds of an increasingly decadent society. The meaningless repetition of various highly emotional phrases or words having little or no genuine theological value often adds to a dense hypnotic state in this form of false worship.

As world conditions decline even further in the future, music that is even more decadent will likely find its way into the temporal church – until the temporal church finally succumbs to the final apostasy of the last days. In the future time of the great apostasy, the institutional church will give itself over fully to various seducing spirits (cf. 1Ti.4:1). We can already see this happening to the secular community at large through new age and various other neo-pagan religious practices and beliefs. Elements of those false practices and beliefs are continually infiltrating temporal churches through wild glossolalia and other extra-biblical traditions as they seek after many sensual experiences to pleasure and reassure their flesh (cf. Newsletter January 2015). This desire for enhanced emotionalism and pleasurable experience is assisted by increasingly decadent forms of music and dance being introduced into “worship services.” We find dance, which is alleged to be motivated by the Holy Spirit, being performed within charismatic churches while in still other churches it is accepted under the pretext of providing a

sign-language translation of the lyrics of Christian contemporary music. In the absence of the deaf who understand and have need of sign language, this performance becomes but a silent form of glossolalia.

As we stated at the very beginning of this newsletter, the corruption of Christian worship music is but a symptom of a far greater underlying apostasy of the faith. Following an opening worship portion, the remainder of many of today's services are likewise designed to entertain in the hopes of holding the attention of impatient "pew-sitters" after all the loud emotional music has come to an end. Because of the growing ignorance of sound biblical doctrine by many contemporary church congregations, ancient occult activities are being viewed as a suitable means to offer up worship to God, as neo-pagan thinkers enter the church in increasingly greater numbers. Evangelical churches as well as many moderately-conservative churches have adopted much of the worldly occult methods of her liberal and/or charismatic sister churches. Even once biblically-sound churches, discovering that their membership was dwindling, desperately sought various innovative means to halt the exodus – especially the loss of their younger members. One way this trend was slowed was through the adoption of worldly contemporary worship music to appease their young minds. Sound theological contemplation and expectant prayer was set aside as being non-productive as an unreasonable sense of survivalism gripped them. This urgency caused them to move away from a firm stand on Holy Scripture and patient trust in the providence of God toward an unwise dabbling in modern-day churchianity. Still other churches introduced meaningless religious formalism or other gimmicks into their worship service to make it aesthetically appealing to the neo-pagan mindset of their congregations.

Community outreach programs, purportedly intended to reach the lost outside the church for Christ, rapidly degenerated into psychological self-help seminars that were devoid of biblical truth lest they offend an unbeliever and potentially prevent them from applying for membership in the future. As more and more unbelievers came into the church, Sunday School classes degenerated into mere psychobabble as sound expository teaching of Scripture was neglected in favor of various self-improvement programs. Those programs often came through the door on ready-to-use videotape and later on DVD's, all of which released church pastors and elders from the hard work of preparing sound Bible-based classes – which were becoming increasingly unpopular and unattended by their secular-minded congregations anyway. In doing this, church leaders were blatantly ignoring the words of the Apostle Paul in Colossians 2:8 when he said, "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."

In a satanically motivated effort to establish world unity through global ecumenism, liberal church leaders began characterizing all religions as being the same. Each recognized and worshiped the same universal god, they said, although different religious groups may view that god in vastly different ways. Accordingly, personal life styles and the means used to worship that god could legitimately vary from view to view. By redefining God as a nebulous deity that can be easily conformed to human thoughts and aspirations, He can no longer be perceived as an absolute being but only as an abstract concept. In some liberal churches, God is not seen as a personal being, but a mere life force or idea. This nebulous view of God (i.e. "open deism") found its way into many churches unchallenged under the guise of exercising "loving" tolerance for another person's religious views. While we may respect a person's peculiar views about many things, that general tolerance does not mean that we can accept all religious views as valid when they directly conflict with Holy Scripture. Through the exultation of "tolerance" as a primary Christian virtue, the liberal temporal church moved increasingly farther away from what was but an outward facade of Christianity to an even more decadent form of abstract humanistic religion in general.

As we conclude this brief summary, we find that the temporal church on earth has been largely seduced and infiltrated by the sorcery of new-age thinking and neo-paganism that has eroded its ability to truly worship God. Today's decadent contemporary worship music is only symptomatic of that overall decay. Temporal churches in this current age find themselves overwhelmed by a global humanist ideology that seems to them much more powerful and exciting than true biblical faith. The Christian beliefs of an earlier era, which were based upon the exacting authority of Holy Scripture, has been replaced by a numbing sense of religious tolerance of sin, rooted in a false sense of brotherly love grounded in secular humanism and political correctness. For the most part, today's temporal churches have rejected the Truth and have swallowed Satan's lie that all roads of religion lead to the pacification of an increasingly nebulous god, such that all men are exempt from any possibility of divine judgment for their actions on earth – let alone eternal judgment in a Hell after death. Many of today's temporal churches are ripe for divine judgment unless they return to their biblical roots. © Arthur J. Smith, November 2015