

# **Christianity and Rock & Roll**

## **Introduction**

As Christians we should understand and evaluate not only the culture of the church, but the culture of the world. This is especially true concerning the arts that surround us. We should be able to understand and evaluate the influences that the arts have on both the Church and the broader culture. We should also be able to understand ways that the Church can use the arts in a way that impacts the broader culture. The intent of this essay is to discover how this may be done through the art of popular music. Typically Christians have associated popular music with negativity. The goal of this paper is to both challenge traditional thought on this issue and offer a solution.

Evangelicals have a tendency to first separate themselves from the popular culture and then to imitate it. Rather than doing this and becoming dualists who teach Christ instead of culture, we should remain in the culture and be a people who teach that Christ transforms culture. This essay will discuss the mainline view of evangelicals concerning Rock music, the attempts of Contemporary Christian Music to provide an alternative, a more objective view of popular music, and a redefinition of Rock music in a way that points to the truth.

## **A Brief Word About Art**

The aim of art has conventionally been understood as beauty, which is generally defined as what is pleasing to us. Art is also used to convey feelings. These feelings and this beauty should point to the good. The question is, what is the good? Most people would say that the good is the unity of humanity, and the stronger the feelings that serve to unite and better humanity, the better the art. However, some would disagree with the idea that art points to the good because of how the good may vary from culture to culture, so it is proposed here that the

good should be viewed as truth, and from a Christian perspective truth must be absolute. God is truth and therefore the Good can be viewed as pointing toward God. Art makes the audience feel a certain way. When art is made for immoral purposes it must be viewed as “bad art,” but when it conveys the truth it should be viewed as “good art.” Everyone may prefer certain works of art over others, but this will not distinguish good art from bad art. Different people feel differently and the appreciation (enjoyment) of art is in the eye of the beholder. Individual opinions are subjective. Therefore, the difference between good art and bad art must be determined by its truthfulness or its morality. This being stated, let us move to the conventional view of popular music among Christians.

### **The Conventional View of Rock Music Among Christians**

Since Rock and Roll first began to gain popularity in the early 1950s, Christians have been leery of the music. Originally it was Elvis who shook his hips causing inappropriate body motions; but almost as early the lyrics were questioned as well. Rock and Roll was a slang term used among the black community for having sex. Other early songs such as the Rolling Stones’, “Lets Spend the Night Together” brought out the idea of having sex, although it was implied rather than explicitly spoken of, as most artists do today. Over time other areas of Rock were questioned as well.<sup>1</sup> Most Christian critics boil the ideologies in Rock and Roll down to five major themes: Sex, Drugs, Rebellion, False Religion, and Satan.<sup>2</sup> The most fundamental of

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<sup>1</sup> For further information on the history of Rock and Roll and the controversies surrounding it, reference Michael Campbell and James Brody, *Rock and Roll: An Introduction*, (New York: Schirmer Books, 1999); Carl Belz, *The Story of Rock*, 2 ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Michael J. Buddas and Marion M. Ohman, *Rock Recall: Annotated Readings in American Popular Music from the Emergence of Rock and Roll to the Demise of the Woodstock Nation*, (Needham Heights; MA: Ginn Press, 1993); Donald Clarke, *The Rise and Fall of Popular Music*, (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1995); probably one of the best books on this topic that is accurate, thorough, and objective, is Linda Martin and Kerry Segrave *Anti-Rock: The Opposition to Rock ’n’ Roll*, (Hamden; CN: Archon Books, 1988) this book discusses rock from its beginning in 1954 through 1986 and does so in a way that prepares the reader for the best possible understanding of the events surrounding the music in history.

<sup>2</sup> Michael K. Haynes, *The god of Rock: A Christian Perspective of Rock Music* (Lindale; TX: Priority Ministries and Publications, 1982), 35-56.

these, for critics, is Satan, because he leads to all the other themes. Jacob Aranza notes that rebellion has seven characteristics: pride, not doing what one is told, never being honest with one's self or others, shifting blame, always questioning the authority of others, pointing out that they (the rebellious) have been wronged, and always seeing themselves as right. He goes on to say that the actions leading to rebellion are disobedience, self-deceit (not being honest with yourself), stubbornness, looking for idols (role models), looking into witchcraft, the occult, and a fascination with death.<sup>3</sup> These themes may be correct, and while they hold true to a certain degree, many evangelical critics do not stop here. They take their conclusions to extremes that even Rock artists themselves may not intend. These themes are generally attributed in a stereotypical fashion to every Rock artist in general, and not on a case-by-case basis. Not every artist, however, plays music characterized by the occult, disobedience, or immoral passion.

Michael Haynes, the author who pointed out the five themes, attributed all of them to Satan. He wrote out a description of the prince of darkness that stated:

As you have already noticed in the outline revealing the characteristics of Satan, he is called in Ephesians 2:2 "...the prince of the power of the Air." the word Air has to do with the stellar atmosphere...the lower air. ITS MEANING YIELDS GREAT INSIGHT AS TO WHY THERE IS SO MUCH POWER BEHIND THE VEHICLE OF ROCK MUSIC. You see, Satan is in charge of what goes over the airways. He is the god of the air: hence, THE *god* of Rock.<sup>4</sup>

He goes on to state that the messengers of Rock must dedicate their music to Satan in order to have a best-selling album and song, because he is in charge of what the radio plays.<sup>5</sup> It is not difficult to see that he employs some faulty logic in statements such as these.<sup>6</sup> Following this there is a section in the same book on subliminal messages, a lengthy section discussing

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<sup>3</sup> Jacob Aranza, *Backward Masking Unmasked: Backward Satanic Messages of Rock and Roll Exposed*, (Shreveport; LA: Hunington House, 1984), 54-55.

<sup>4</sup> Haynes, 28.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 56-57.

bands (although each band has a rather shallow description as he covers too many of them for the amount of space he uses), a section on songs and meanings, and he ends with a series of questions intended to encourage the reader to stop listening to Rock music.

Another evangelist who follows in these footsteps is D. L. Michelson, who discusses how Rock music is made up of pulsation, syncopation, repetition, and extreme volume. These are accurate characteristics of the genre, and he goes on to say that many songs are made up of a vocabulary that mixes the words of evangelicals with the slang terms of youth. However, Michelson attributes this to carnality and deception, never taking into consideration that the artists may truly be searching for God.<sup>7</sup> William J. Schafer also follows a pattern somewhat close to this and states that to “earnestly desire to grow closer to the Lord you must forsake completely any hindrance to your spiritual growth. I believe that rock music is such a hindrance.”<sup>8</sup> While Schafer is correct about forsaking hindrances, I do not believe that all rock is such a hindrance, although some of it certainly is. Schafer goes on to state five suggestions for those who enjoy Rock and Roll:

1. LYRICAL CONTENT WHICH IS OPPOSED TO BIBLE STANDARDS AND ACCEPTED CHRISTIAN BEHAVIOR SHOULD BE AVOIDED.
2. DO NOT LISTEN TO MUSIC PERFORMERS WHO LIVE IMMORAL LIVES AND PROMOTE ANTI-CHRISTIAN CAUSES.
3. ROCK MUSIC WITH RELIGIOUS WORDS CAN NEVER BE CONSIDERED LEGITIMATE GOSPEL MUSIC.
4. ANYONE WHO DOES NOT KNOW JESUS CHRIST AS PERSONAL SAVIOR AND SINGS UNDER THE PRETENSE OF GLORIFYING HIM IS COMMITTING NOTHING SHORT OF BLASPHEMY.

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<sup>6</sup> I do not agree completely with Haynes, or the other critics presented in this section of the essay.

<sup>7</sup> D. L. Michelson, *Rock Music: Careful or Carnal*, (Orlando: Christ for the World, 1975), 15-19. Steve Turner believes that Rock music is a search for redemption.

<sup>8</sup> William J. Schafer, *Rock Music: Where its Been, What it Means, Where its Going*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972), 50.

5. YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE MUSIC WHICH YOU ALLOW TO ENTER THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. IF YOU FAIL IN YOUR RESPONSIBILITY ONLY YOU ARE TO BLAME.<sup>9</sup>

Schafer, though he wrote before Contemporary Christian Music really took off, does preach the separation of evangelicals from the cultural expressions expressed through Rock music. He even states that religion and Rock cannot exist harmoniously. He does recognize that “A central literary image of rock culture is of the Quest, the search for meaning, for a world in which to settle.”<sup>10</sup> His downfall is not that he fails to recognize a search; it is that he believes that the search among those of the Rock community leads to rebellion and blasphemy without exception. He has no concept of trying to send out Christians to reach the culture of Rock performers and listeners by placing them on the path, in their quest, that leads to Christ.

As we have seen, many critics of Rock, and especially those who are Christians, call for more of a separation between Christian culture and Rock culture. This was true especially in the 70s when Christian music hadn't really become popular or good yet, but these thoughts and ideas have continued into the 1980s and 1990s with groups such as *Real to Real Ministries* and *Chalmers Music Seminars*.<sup>11</sup> In 1989 *Real to Real* put out the most comprehensive and thorough study of Rock music that had ever been done by evangelicals, yet even their video attributed Rock music to the work of Satan, even if it were unknown to the artists themselves. This included the incidents of back-masking satanic phrases that occurred, even though in many cases the artists were unaware of them. He also challenged people to stop listening to the music because it tends to corrupt. The fact that some Rock music does corrupt does not mean that this

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>11</sup> Real 2 Real Ministries, *Hells Bells: The Dangers of Rock'n'Roll*, (P.O. Box 4145, Gainesville, FL 32613), and Phil Chalmers, Chalmers Music Seminars, *Music to Die For: Is Today's Music Killing Our Teens?* Both of these videos are distributed by American Portrait Films, Inc., P.O. Box 809, Brunswick, OH, 44212 (1-800-736-4567).

is true universally. Blanket statements that all Rock should be avoided, along with the idea that the music must in every case be corruptive. The music does not force people to destroy things, rape women, or commit murder, but it does have a certain amount influence on the people who do those things. The music itself is not responsible for an individual's actions. There is always something else going on in the heart and mind of the individual who willfully commits these sins.

Phil Chalmers, in *Music To Die For*, challenges youth to stop listening to secular music and to give Christian music a try for 30 days. *Hells Bells* does so as well, and both teach separation. This idea leads us into the next section of the essay, which is an overview of contemporary Christian music, from its beginnings to its present state, including an evaluation of its effectiveness among different segments of our culture.

### **The World of Contemporary Christian Music**

When confronted with culture, Christians have a tendency to do two things. The first is to separate themselves from that culture, and the second is to imitate that culture after they become isolated from it (of the world not in it, rather than vice versa). The fact that this has been done for about the last thirty years now has caused Christians to become overtly dualistic in their worldviews, as well as to put on a façade before the world that says “we are different than you,” and at the same time shows the world a hypocritical display of the ideas and actions of professing Christians.

Christian music is generally thought to have began in the 70s with Larry Norman who had long blond hair, sang about apocalyptic images and cracked jokes about how Rock was God's Music, Satan stole it, and how Norman himself was stealing it back. The first true Rock band in Christian circles, Petra, whose first album was released in 1974, soon followed him.

However, this is not exactly where Christian Rock actually began. It seems to have originated among individuals such as Chuck Berry who was the son of a Baptist preacher, Buddy Holly who was a devout Baptist, and Ray Charles, Sam Cooke, and Aretha Franklin who all began their music careers by singing Gospel. Rock was quickly separated from religion, however, and it received little attention until Larry Norman came onto the scene, despite the fact that all through the sixties other religions were looked at in Rock music.<sup>12</sup> For the first two decades of Christian music (with few exceptions) less than adequate performers, cheesy lyrics, cheap videos poor stage shows, and wannabe artists characterized the industry. Objections from Christians themselves were argued along the lines of Rock being the devils' music, it being inferior to classical church music, or of it just being inferior on the whole.<sup>13</sup> Although these claims are made, many argue that Rock reaches the widest audience, brings about the most feelings, and has more influence on society than any other form of art in the history of the world. It was not until 1995, with the release of *Jesus Freak* by DC Talk, that Christian music began to be taken seriously as a true form of art. Since that time the industry has improved by leaps and bounds as far as quality is concerned, and even spends the same amount of money on some albums that secular artists do.

Nonetheless, the genre of Christian music is still looked upon as something of a joke. The industry tries to reach too broad of an audience with one or two stations playing everything<sup>14</sup> from Sandi Patti to Zao, with no concern for the fact that people generally listen to stations because they enjoy the style, not only because of religious affiliation. Christians have increasingly imitated the culture with their music by moving many worship services to the

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<sup>12</sup> Jay R. Howard and John M. Streck, *Apostles of Rock: The Splintered World of Contemporary Christian Music*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 26-29.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Jason Davis of the Jason Davis Incident, 11/6/2003.

“contemporary” style. Along with this, most Christian bands are either put together for the purpose of mimicking the sound of a specific secular band, or they are made up of musicians that are not good enough to make it in the secular industry. Those artists frequently replace “baby” and “her” with “God” and “Jesus,” and call themselves Christian artists. The lifestyles of these musicians, who call themselves Christians, generally show fruit to the contrary. Christians have set up “Christian clubs” and they have mimicked everything in them that the secular clubs have with the exception of alcohol.

Basically, Christians in our society have not only separated from the culture that surrounds them, but they have also become a replica of it. This is known as the “Christian Subculture” within the broader culture. This is not surprising when one considers the fact that many of the parent record companies that own all of the subculture Christian record companies are not Christian at all. Myrrh is in conjunction with A&M and Epic, Sparrow is in conjunction with MCA, Forefront is with Virgin, and from 1974 to 1992, Word was owned by ABC, which is owned by Disney.<sup>15</sup>

Christian Music has become so popular today that it is one of the largest segments of the 7 billion dollar industry that markets the whole of Christian products.<sup>16</sup> Christian music has also shaped the doctrines of most evangelicals in America. While this is sometimes good, it has given rise to doctrinally unsound worship songs, and taken peoples minds off of Scripture. Through some artists, worship has become more “me” centered than “God” centered. It may be summed up as follows: “The elevation of CCM to the status of Scripture, makes doctrine a matter of musical taste.”<sup>17</sup> The world of Contemporary Christian Music is a realm in which feelings are

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<sup>15</sup> Howard, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Along with music we find doormats, bumper stickers, romance novels and apparel. It has been noted that people need a way to express their faith physically.

<sup>17</sup> Howard, 220.

mixed, messages are mixed, stars are viewed as preachers, not always by their own will, and is almost an exact replica of the rest of the auditory art in popular culture.

Some Christian artists truly are genuine in their beliefs, present sound doctrine, and create music of the same quality as that in the secular realm. Examples would include DC Talk, Steven Curtis Chapman, Amy Grant, and Audio Adrenaline. These artists have the ability to transform culture, but before we discuss this, let us move into a more objective analysis of Rock and Roll that deals with Contemporary Christian music and Secular music based on style and message.

### **An Objective View of Secular Music**

Rock music is sometimes said to control people and make them do things that they would not normally do by having the beat possess them, among other things. However, when people jump around, clap their hands, move their bodies to the beat, snap their fingers, throw their fists in the air, or scream at the top of their lungs they are doing it by choice. “Rock frenzies are self induced, not rhythm induced, and each listener can choose how to react. Music does have power to move, but not to override normal sensibilities.”<sup>18</sup> People who act any given way when listening to Rock music do it by choice.<sup>19</sup>

Let us now look at the themes that were mentioned above, beginning with **sex**, because it is the most popular. Nearly every musician of any given style deals with sex at least to some degree. “Sex in song is not new. Every age has had its bawdy songs, illicit lyrics, double

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<sup>18</sup> Steve Lawhead, *Rock Reconsidered: A Christian Looks at Contemporary Music*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1981), 67.

<sup>19</sup> Plato would argue against this idea. He stated how dangerous poets are to the society because of their influence over the morals of that society. Modern day examples might include Alice Cooper or Pete Townshend who claim that when they are on stage the music possesses them, taking control of their minds, making them act in ways that would normally not be found in their characters. Further study on the power of music over the emotions and will of listeners and performers should be looked at to discuss this more thoroughly.

meanings.”<sup>20</sup> Rock is no different than other styles, and it is guilty of promoting views about sex that are not in line with God’s plan for sex in human life. From songs such as Tommy James’ “I Think We’re Alone Now” to Madonna’s “Like a Virgin,” we see distorted views about true love, forgiveness, adultery, and even false appearances of sex and its joys, such as in videos of Limp Bizkit. Fred Durst, the front man of this band, has said that he wants his lifestyle to look cool, but the girls in his videos are paid and in reality, he is single and miserable.<sup>21</sup> Some singers such as Debbie Harry of Blondie see sex and Rock as inseparable; while this may not be the case with every artist, it is difficult to come across one who does not.

The second theme is **drugs**. It is well known that many groups since the sixties have been into drugs. In fact, drugs have killed many of the people generally believed to be the most talented musicians of our time: Hendrix, Bonham, Joplin, and Moon, to name a few. Themes of drugs are seen in songs as well as in the lives of the artists, but when they are used in the songs, they are generally used as reflections of how the artists genuinely feel. Artists are not always trying to lead people astray (although they are doing this), but rather they are communicating what they believe. The problem is that most of the musicians who sing about drugs look to them for fulfillment in life. They are living from one high to the next, and they do not want to come down. These artists display the wretchedness of humanity, in its fallen state through their lifestyles and in their search for meaning in life.

The third theme, **rebellion**, is also seen in both the lifestyles and the songs of many rockers. Punk Rock is especially vocal on this point. Artists such as Iggy Pop and Axel Rose have been arrested for blatant rebellion, and the latter for starting a riot at his own concert. Songs such as Twisted Sisters’ “We’re Not Gonna Take It,” the Beastie Boys’ “Fight for Your

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>21</sup> *Music to Die For*.

Right (to Party),” are examples of rebellion that lead to hate, anarchy, and even violent crime. While many themes of rebellion encourage society to rise up and shake its fist at authority, it is not always done for the sake of anarchy. Many Rock artists have been anti-war for four decades now, and even this is viewed as a form of rebellion. Creedence Clearwater Revival’s “Fortunate Son” is an example of this. Rebellion of this kind has been a theme in Rock since Vietnam and carries on to the present conflicts in the Middle East. Sometimes it is done with the intent to promote peace, and each case must be evaluated individually.<sup>22</sup>

**False religion** is the fourth theme. This is evident in the work of musicians from the least to the most famous, and from Folk and Blue Grass to the sounds of Death Metal. All musicians believe something, and what they believe is expressed in their work. It is how they share their worldview (which is generally fallen). Just as they may sing about peace and life on the street, their ideas about politics, religion, and God also find their way into their art. A better name for the theme may be “religion” rather than “false religion”, because many of the artists do not think that what they are presenting is false (though much of it is). They are, once again, sharing what they believe. Bob Marley was a known Rastafarian. Bruce Springsteen grew up Catholic, and the ideas of sin and redemption are strong themes of his lyrics. Bono is a professing Christian, and themes of justice and wretchedness are found in his music. Many times they are brought out by how Bono sees them in the world today and how they relate to the Old Testament.<sup>23</sup> Lauren Hill once said that all music is spiritual, and I believe she is right. It may not all agree with Christianity in the nature of its spirituality, but it does point to something higher. As we know, without Special Revelation from God, people will never be able to bring

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<sup>22</sup> This is not to excuse the behavior of artists that promote violence, hate, and anarchy, etc.

<sup>23</sup> Bono sees the Psalms as early forms of the Blues, and he has stated that the Blues necessitate having the Gospel, and without the Blues there would be no need for the Gospel. For Further information on this, refer to *Hungry for Heaven*, by Steve Turner.

themselves to the God of Christianity, because man must be drawn to that God. What is presented about religion may not always be true, but it is a truthful portrayal of what they and many of their listeners believe. Bob Dylan said, “I think art can lead you to God. I think that’s the purpose of everything. If it’s not doing that, what’s it doing? It’s leading you the other way. It’s certainly not leading you nowhere.”<sup>24</sup> This will be discussed further in the next section.

**Satan** is considered to be a major theme of Rock music, especially in the lyrics of heavier bands of the genre known as Death Metal, but they are not the only ones who sing about the devil. Generally, when bands sing about the devil, it is done in a lighthearted manner. That is not to say it is **appropriate**, but it is also not to say that the artist is asking the listener to worship Satan. Rather, the artist is probably using the imagery to point to temptation or to make an allusion to “sinful” feelings. However, there are bands who do not take this approach and they should be warned against and even condemned. The artists who normally sing to the prince of darkness in this manner are either followers of Anton LaVey, the author of the *Satanic Bible*, or Aleister Crowley, one of the widest known Satanists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. These artists sing more about the death of God and the persecution of Christians than any other bands, and are made up of groups such as XTC, Christian Death, Crown of Thorns, and Ludichrist. In the songs of these bands we find the worst conceivable effects of the fall of man, the blatant rebellion of humanity against the Divine, where the fool scoffs at the Creator to His face. Despite artists like these, not all Rock artists devote their songs to the devil. Neither do they all sing songs of this nature, though some critics still believe this to be the case.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Steve Turner, *Hungry for Heaven: Rock 'n' Roll & the Search for Redemption*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 159.

<sup>25</sup> Bands that do promote devilish themes must be dealt with in a way that condemns the work they are doing, and I do not believe Christians should listen to music that promotes the persecution of Christians or other cultures, neither should they condone music that blasphemously speaks out against God the Father or the Son, Jesus Christ.

It has been stated: “Rock is basically a ‘body’ music appealing to people on a sensual level. The driving sound and rhythm seduces the listeners, urging them to indulge in physical pleasures. How can such music communicate anything spiritual?”<sup>26</sup> What we have seen in this “body music” however, whether right or wrong, is that it contains themes that deal with the fulfillment of self. They explain the attempts that the artists make to find peace. As far as this idea of the seductive sound is concerned, a better way to explain it would be that “listeners can easily apprehend the beat and follow along, tap their feet or clap their hands if they want to. A march can have similar effect...Notice that music does not *make* people clap their hands; many just find it easier to do so with music than without.”<sup>27</sup> A quick answer to why Rock music is often seen as the most popular music in the world may be found here—it is easy to follow along with. As we have seen it is syncopated, repetitive, easy to dance, clap, whistle, or sing to, and it deals with issues of belonging, being wanted, fulfilled, and finding peace. A better answer to the previous question of the popularity of Rock may be found here—the search for fulfillment. It is no wonder that this music reaches so many people, and it is no wonder that it can easily be used for teaching spiritual lessons. People often like it, and if they do, it brings about feelings in them.<sup>28</sup> What better feelings to bring about than those that are conducive to spirituality, themes dealing with creation, fall, and redemption?

### **The Redemption of Rock**

As we have seen, Bob Dylan states that the purpose of art is to lead people to God. This would be the highest good. But if art is to lead us to God, and much of popular music leads us away from God, then what are we as Christians to do about it? The ideas above express that we

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<sup>26</sup> Lawhead, 102.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 102.

should either condemn it, or that we should imitate it without actually becoming one with it. Rock has tremendous influence on our society. It is “a force uniting and amplifying ideas and feelings.”<sup>29</sup> If this is the case, Christian artists should use their talents with the goal of amplifying ideas and feelings which can change our society for the better. Instead of separating from the popular culture and then imitating it, why not aim to transform it (as some artist are already doing)? As Christians we are not called to be of the world, but we are to be active in it, and our actions in our communities may greatly direct the way in which our culture is headed. Even Vladimir Lenin stated that the easiest way to change a culture is through its music.<sup>30</sup> If this is the case, we as Christians ought to play music to change our society for the better.

This brings up the question of what makes Christian music Christian? Some might say that the lyrics must speak of God or Christ directly, but this certainly cannot be all there is to it. If it were, then love songs by Michael W. Smith and Steven Curtis Chapman would have to be rejected on the grounds that they are not directly about God. Some might say that it is not a question of the lyrics, but rather the heart of the artist. If this is the case, then an artist who claims to be a Christians but doesn't play “CCM friendly” songs should also have his or her music considered to be Christian. This brings up several other questions. What do we do with artists who claim to be Christians, but who deny Christ by their lifestyles? What about Christians who say things that are false in their lyrics, even if by accident? What do we do with artists who are not Christians, but still have an element of truth in their music? How is it to be classified? We must conclude, then, that Christian music may not be considered as such based solely on the life and claims of the artists, or on the basis of whether the lyrics speak openly

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<sup>28</sup> For additional information on themes in Rock music, consult Jim Curtis, *Rock Eras: Interpretations of Music and Society, 1954-1984*, (Bowling Green; OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987) and James F. Harris, *Philosophy at 33 1/3 rpm: Themes of Classic Rock Music*, (Chicago: Open Court, 1993).

<sup>29</sup> Schafer, 76.

about God. This being the case, what then should we consider to be Christian? It is in answer to this that I would like to discuss a solution as to how we as believers should view Rock, and how we should relate to the culture musically.<sup>31</sup>

If truth is a characteristic of God, and if all truth is God's truth, then anything that is true is of God. This is precisely why we must not limit what is considered to be Christian on the basis of whether or not the name of Jesus is used in the art. Rather, we should speak *Christianly* of war, love, religion, education, growing up, learning to drive, finding fulfillment and meaning in life, and about the world around us including the state that it is in (fallen). When Christians do not want to sing about depression, it appears as though they are saying that Christians do not become depressed. If this is true, why are books written about depression for Christians? Christians have it in their minds that we are to be constantly happy, and they want to portray only the best aspects of life to the world around them. The truth, however, is that becoming a Christian does not eliminate problems. Rather, it allows one to face those problems with God by their side. The world is in a fallen state, and when we do not portray it that way as Christians, then we are not portraying the truth. If we are not portraying truth, then what we are portraying is not of God. Likewise, if Rock is a search for fulfillment, then we must also portray redemption as a theme in our music; all the while showing the beauty of truth.

As Christians we should be critical of what the world does in a way that is still forgiving, but we should not imitate it if we do not approve of it (speaking of the genre); to do so only brings reproach upon the Church and causes us to appear hypocritical. Instead, we should take note that the world has a fallen and distorted view of reality. We should, then, truthfully portray

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<sup>30</sup> *Hells Bells and Music to Die For*.

<sup>31</sup> One book that gives spiritual lessons for both Secular and Contemporary Christian songs is Tim and Patty Atkins, *Music Worth Talking About: A Guide for Youth Leaders*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995). I do not

that reality in what we do, only doing it in such a way that it leads the listeners to the Father.

Only He brings fulfillment to the quest of life. Let us now look at two examples that demonstrate how truthfully portraying reality, while pointing to God at the same time, may be done.

### *Peace on Earth*

Heaven on Earth/ We need it now/ I'm sick of all this/ Hanging around/ Sick of Sorrow/  
Sick of pain/ Sick of hearing again and again/ That there's gonna be/ Peace on Earth/  
Where I grew up/ There weren't many trees/ Where there was we'd tear them down/ And  
use them on our enemies/ They say that what you mock/ Will surely overtake you/ And  
you become the monster/ So the monster will not break you/ It's already gone too far/  
Who said that if you go in hard/ You won't get hurt/ Jesus could you take the time/ To  
throw a drowning man a line/ Peace on Earth/ Tell the ones who hear no sound/ Whose  
sons are living in the ground/ Peace on Earth/ No whos or whys/ No-one cries like a  
mother cries/ For Peace on Earth/ She never got to say goodbye/ To see the colour in his  
eyes/ Now he's in the dirt/ That's peace on Earth/ They're reading names out over the  
radio/ All the folks the rest of us won't get to know/ Sean and Julia, Gareth, Ann and  
Breda/ Their lives are bigger, than any big idea/ Jesus can you take the time/ To throw a  
drowning man a line/ Peace on Earth/ To tell the ones who hear no sound/ Whose sons  
are living in the ground/ Peace on Earth/ Jesus this song you wrote/ The words are  
sticking in my throat/ Peace on Earth/ Hear it every Christmas time/ But hope and history  
won't rhyme/ So what's it worth?/ This Peace on Earth/ Peace on Earth/ Peace on Earth/  
Peace on Earth<sup>32</sup>

### *Perfect World*

Some believe this world is bound to get much better/ They think utopia is just around the  
bend/ They'd like humanity to come up with the answers/ So they can keep their heads  
safely buried in the sand/ This is my Father's world and He can fix it/ Our hopeless band-  
aids are all counterfeit/ In a perfect world God's throne will come/ In a perfect world-In a  
perfect world/ In a perfect world ruled by His Son/ In a perfect world-In a perfect world/  
Some still worship Mother Nature in her glory/ They do a good thing when they stand up  
for her right/ But Mother Nature has a Father in the heavens/ And His creation went  
astray, but never left His sight/ The old will pass away and bring a new birth/ A whole  
new heaven and a new earth/ Kingdom come/ His will be done/ On the Earth/ As it is in  
heaven/ Till we come to where there is no night/ And the Lord Himself will be our light<sup>33</sup>

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agree with all of the interpretations of the songs in the book, but it does at least attempt to bridge the gap between Secular and Contemporary Christian art.

<sup>32</sup> Music by U2, Lyrics by Bono, PolyGram International Music Publishing B.V. except Blue Mountain Music Ltd (UK), Mother Music (Irl.) c 2000 Universal International Music B.V., exclusively licensed to Interscope Records in the U.S.A.

<sup>33</sup> C 2003 INPOP RECORDS.

The first example is a song by U2 that deals with the struggle to find peace in life, and states that those who have died have more peace than those living do, but it is also a call to Jesus, asking Him to come and bring peace, something that has not been seen consistently throughout history. This song describes injustice, and it is true. The interesting thing is that this song, considered to be a secular one, shares with the listener the world's view of peace, which is that it doesn't exist. In doing this, the song still points to Christ. The second song, by Petra, is considered a Contemporary Christian song. It speaks truthfully of the world and gives an answer to the question raised by U2. This song teaches that God will redeem the whole of His creation, not just some of it. It is also an example of how a Christian song may speak truthfully about the world, to the world. Petra's song is a harder Rock song than the previous example. This shows that, contrary to certain ideas that have already been discussed, religious lyrics set to Rock music can present the legitimate Gospel, and can do so in a way that the world can relate to.

The Christian faith is to be characterized by love, and as Christians we are to love the world and reach out to it, sharing with whomever possible the hope we have found. Instead of condemning Rock music as a genre on the whole, let us take the themes and ideas of Rock music and redirect them to the Truth. Instead of singing love songs in which love is equated with lust and physical passion, let us sing about pure love without neglecting the physical, but with an emphasis on the moral. Let us sing songs about poverty, abortion, rape, and murder, but let us do it in a way that portrays them for what they really are—distortions of the truth. This may be in stark contrast to the majority of songs dealing with these issues, but art produced for moral rather than immoral purposes is “better” art.

Let us step out into the culture and begin to change society, not by shoving the gospel down the throats of listeners, but by helping to shape their ideas about morality, ethics, and

beauty (beauty being truth), in a way that points them back to the Creator.<sup>34</sup> Let us not become dualists, who separate from the world and then imitate it. Let us send our best out into the world to take positions of leadership, where they may change and reshape it. God is in the process of redeeming all of His creation, Rock included. Let us not condemn what God can renew, but let us use it for his glory. In conclusion, “Rather than condemning rock, God’s people should be in the position of encouraging what is good, worthy, and true in popular music. Where wrongs have been committed, where error is practiced, we need a vigorous demonstration of the truth. Rather than fettering or shackling our Christian artists, we must encourage them to higher achievement. For the Christian community and the world at large desperately need the creativity, enthusiasm, courage, and vision Christian artists can bring.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> I am not suggesting that there is not a place for Gospel music. There is. Christians should write and sing Christian songs that teach us about our faith and help us to better love and worship God. However, “Christian” should be a genre of music not a subculture for music. Rather than having Christian Rock, and Christian Country, etc., we should have Christians who sing Rock and Country songs that people can relate to on a practical level, and which points to truth in a way that is latent with Christian belief. Dualism is not the answer to music for Christians, but rather redemption of music is the answer. Christian music as a genre needs to be seen differently than Christian music as an alternative to another form of music. This is also not to say that someone cannot write Christian songs that teach us about doctrine in a way that does not sound like “gospel.” Likewise, it is not to say that Christians should sing doctrinal songs which are musically inferior to other styles. I believe that Christian music should focus as much on the sound as on the message, because God deserves our best, and we should give it to Him in all of our efforts. Christians should lead the culture in this way rather than follow it.

<sup>35</sup> Lawhead, 136.