

MUSIC WARS "ROCK ON"

(By Joe R. Price)

An article appeared in USA Today this week chronicling the battle among Protestant Churches over worship music ("Church music wars battle for souls with song," Cathy Lynn Grossman, USA Today, Nov. 17, 2011). Grossman noted, "in many U.S. churches today, worship musicians bang the drums for God and singers croon as if Christ were their boyfriend."

Rick Muchow (music pastor for the Saddleback Church founded by evangelist Rick Warren) is quoted as saying, "The Bible does not have an official soundtrack."

"The nation's fifth-largest Protestant church, with nine satellite locations, runs several concurrent worship services Sunday mornings at its main site in Lake Forest, Calif., each with a different genre of music.

"Muchow lists: a Gospel praise service; a "straight-ahead rock" called Overdrive; one called Fuel that's "geared to 20-somethings with more alternative music;" and a Traditions service with piano and a singer. Traditions is the only service using hymnals." (Ibid)

Muchow uses the classic defense for denominationalism to justify this buffet of worship music: "There are all different kinds of churches for different kinds of people. We don't worship music, we worship God." (Ibid)

This sentiment is echoed by Tommy Kyllonen,

"also known as Urban D, the Christian hip-hop artist pastor behind Tampa's Crossover Church, is down with the new music."

"We have a big world and a big God. As long as people are worshiping in spirit and in truth, we can worship in any way that reaches our hearts, he says. After all, the Bible calls for believers to 'sing a new song to the Lord.'" (Ibid)

Self-defined "spirit" and self-defined "truth."

These "music wars" are not limited to America. A Lutheran Church in Sweden now offers "techno Mass:"

STOCKHOLM (AP) - Simon Klemenjak does some street dance moves and throws his hands up in the air to cheer on the crowd before he starts singing to the techno beat in front of the altar in the Church of All Saints in Stockholm. ("Swedish Lutheran church hosts 'techno Mass,'" USA Today)

Klemenjak makes no apology for using faddish music to attract young people:

"There is already a hip hop Mass, there is a rock Mass and a jazz Mass," the 28-year-old priest said. "But it is mainly club music that we listen to and that we like dancing to, so it felt like a natural choice." (Ibid)

Christians are not immune to the seductive calls to accommodate worship to meet their emotional desires. We must be biblically informed and faithfully committed to true worship, not to will worship that is arranged and offered by men (Jno. 4:24; Col. 2:23). So, let us briefly examine these worship music "wars" in the light of Scripture.

"The Bible does not have an official soundtrack"

Far from Mr. Muchow's claim, the word of God does reveal "an official soundtrack" for worship: "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" (Col. 3:16, emp. JRP).

Psalms are sacred or pious songs, and immediately remind us of the inspired selections in the Old Testament book of Psalms. The Bible says when a Christian is cheerful to "let him sing psalms," not "club music" that rocks the joint in the name of Jesus (Jas. 5:13)!

Hymns are songs of praise addressed to God. As such, they must be reverent, holy, and humble - a far cry from the "straight-ahead rock" heard at Rick Warren's Saddleback Church. When Paul and Silas were imprisoned at Philippi they were "singing hymns" (praises) to God - not hip hopping to a techno-beat (Acts 16:25). David prophesied of the Messiah (fulfilled in Jesus), "in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise (hymns) to you" (Psa. 22:22; Heb. 2:12). Who can envision Jesus with hands waving and rock music blasting, hip-hopping hymns to the Father in heaven? Such blasphemy offered by men is not true worship (Jno. 4:24).

Spiritual songs (odes or chants) are songs of spiritual rather than fleshly content. These songs do not excite fleshly actions and appetites (like dancing to club music does). Instead, they focus the mind on spiritual and eternal things. Christians are not to be carnally-minded (controlled by the flesh), but spiritually-minded (controlled by God's Spirit-revealed law, Rom. 8:5-9). The "contemporary" worship music offered up by denominations and megachurches do not meet the Bible test of "spiritual" songs.

"Different churches, people, and music"

In striking contrast to the ecumenical plea to "join the church of your choice", the Bible says there is "one body" (the church of Christ, Eph. 4:4; 1:22-23; Matt. 16:18). The issue is not that people are different, it is that "you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). We do not have the right to build different churches and offer God music that is different from what Christ approves in His gospel. Christ is our ultimate authority, not Moses, not David, and not our contemporary styles and preferences (Matt. 28:18-20; 17:5). When the word of Christ dwells richly in one's heart, the authority of Christ is obeyed in all things, including the music used in worship of God (Col. 3:16-17).

"Sing a new song to the Lord"

In both Revelation 5:9 and 14:3 a "new" song is sung, but not like those sung by "Urban D!" The new song is sung before the throne of God, praising the Lamb for His worthiness to redeem sinners (5:9). Then, a new song is sung by the redeemed in a triumphant scene of glory (14:3). The fresh, new nature of redemption's song is emphasized.

There is nothing "new" about sinful attempts to worship God as seen in today's churches. God rejects heart-devised worship (Jeroboam, 1 Kgs. 12:25-33). Let us all take heed lest we worship at Jeroboam's altar.

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