

ENDNOTES: MUSIC AS ECUMENICAL FORCE

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As Seventh-day Adventists we believe that our witness is to be wholistic—an integrated message for spirit, mind, and body. We see the Christian faith as not just a set of doctrines but as a way of life to live and share with others. Hence, lifestyle dimensions such as diet and exercise are integral to our faith, and medical, educational, and relief work vital to our outreach.

Need: An Aesthetic Witness

However, there are certain blindspots or gaps in our message, both in the way it is proclaimed and how it is lived. One such gap is the arts, or what is broadly defined as the aesthetic realm—music, dance, theater, and movies. This is one aspect of Adventist lifestyle in which the communication and transmission of distinctive values is weak. The Valuegenesis study revealed that scarcely one quarter of Adventist youth supported church-held positions or standards in this area.¹ The data on adults indicated similar dissent. Interestingly, health-related ideals such as the prohibition of tobacco, beer, liquor and illegal drugs as well as the need for daily exercise were overwhelmingly endorsed.² Clearly, rejection of Adventist lifestyle ideals is not across the board. But, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that today the arts are a component of Adventist lifestyle in which the last verse of the book of Judges is sadly true: "And every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

Unfortunately, discussions about the arts are usually relegated to the endnotes of our message, if noted at all. Perhaps this has occurred because we do not consider the arts important

enough to be part of the body of our message, or maybe we are unsure of just what to say about them. Whatever the case, I believe the time has come to reconsider this omission. As Seventh-day Adventists we believe we have a doctrinal witness to take to the world, and a health witness to share and practice. But is this all? Is there not also an aesthetic witness that is to be a part of our wholistic message? When Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," did that truth as it is in Jesus include a truth about the aesthetic realm? Or, is there no aesthetic truth? Or, is the truth about the aesthetic realm quite legitimately to be ignored as unimportant? Or, are we increasingly intimidated by what we perceive as a purely subjective, "taste-and-preference" issue, especially in a multi-cultural community of faith?

I believe Roger L. Dudley, author of *Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance*, was right when he summed up his discussion of the transmission of Adventist lifestyle valued by calling "for the top attention of denominational leaders, educators, pastors and parents" in this area, as well as "extensive interactive dialogue to clarify how timeless biblical principles should be translated into specific guidelines in our time and place."³ If we fail to do this, the results are clear—the next generation of Adventists will, by default, simply drop altogether "dubious" Adventist standards in the aesthetic realm.

Impact of the Arts

Paradoxically, often the arts alone remain as a concrete witness of a Christian mentality in a particular age. When all the sermons have been preached, all the theological debates adjourned, and all the peoples' lives passed from view, the arts—including literature, music, architecture, sculpture, and painting—stand as a continuing testimony to the belief of the people and time that spawned them.⁴ The values invested in them are then evident to all. But, what will be their witness of Christianity in our age? And what will contemporary Adventist artistic involvement tell future generations? Will it reveal any distinctive impress of Adventist faith?

Of all the arts, music is one of the most commonly utilized and practiced among Adventists. Although she did not write about it as prolifically as health, Ellen White clearly recognized music's impor-

tance, and its impact on lifestyle and spirituality. We will consider just two quotations about music from her writings.

He [Satan] works through the means which will exert the strongest influence to hold the largest numbers in a pleasing infatuation, while they are paralyzed by his power. When turned to good account, music is a blessing, but it is often made one of Satan's most attractive agencies to ensnare souls.⁵

And again she wrote:

Music was made to serve a holy purpose, to lift the thoughts to that which is pure, noble and elevating, and to awaken in the soul devotion and gratitude to God. What a contrast between the ancient custom and the used to which music is not too often devoted! . . . A love for music leads the unwary to unite with world lovers in pleasure-gatherings where God has forbidden His children to go. Thus, that which is a great blessing when rightly used, becomes one of the most successful agencies by which Satan allures the mind from duty and from the contemplation of eternal things.⁶

These two quotations take on particularly significant meaning in light of some recent sociological research into the musical art, and provide provocative reason for clear and serious thinking in this area.

Popular Music: World Unifying Force

In the mind 1980's Bob Geldorf organized his "Live-Aid" program in which top popular musicians joined together in a concert extravaganza to raise money for the Ethiopian famine victims. Linked via satellite, worldwide interest in this venture was so extensive, sociologists began to explore it as a phenomenon. Talk of a "world social formation" and the possibility of a "strategy for global moralization"⁷ were no longer considered a figment of speculative imagination. Because of its universal availability and acceptance, popular music was identified as "the major rallying point for the formation of an international youth culture. . . based on common, worldwide tastes and values."⁸ Describing popular music as a "powerfully cohesive force," concern was expressed that "heavy consumption of internationalized music, most of which has been Anglo-American in origin, may be causing world youth to identify more with globalized music and by extension with the

lifestyle and values of other societies than those of their own culture."⁹

While a subsequent five-year study found that local cultures are continuing to produce their own music and that world musical homogenization is by no means a *fait accompli* certain portentous facts were noted:

1. The popular music of all countries is being shaped by international forces such as multinational capital and technology, and global pop norms and values. In 1985 ethnomusicologist, Bruno Nettl observed: "If there is any trend in world music that might justify the fear of musical homogenization, it would have to be [the] realm of popular music."¹⁰ In 1989 Simon Frith, a prominent scholar of popular music culture, confirmed that: "Even the most nationalistic sounds—carefully cultivated 'folk' songs, angry local dialect punk, preserved (for the tourist) traditional dance—are determined by a critique of international entertainment. No country in the world is unaffected by the way in which the twentieth century mass media . . . have created a universal pop aesthetic."¹¹

2. Significant global synchronization with one cultural pattern has been achieved through popular music. Commenting on this, Cees Hamelink ruefully observed: "Never before has the process of cultural influence proceeded so subtly, without any blood being shed and with the receiving culture thinking it had sought such cultural influence."¹²

3. The global music industry, that is, the selection, recording, promotion, and sale of all categories of music, is largely in the hands of give corporations—RCA (now part of BMG and merged with Ariola), Sony/CBS, Time Warner, EMI, and Polygram.¹³

4. Domination of the "West over the rest" in the promotion and distribution of internationalized popular music is indisputable.¹⁴

5. Substantial promotion and distribution of both classical and popular music by the music industry, tunes the world's ears to specific musical forms.¹⁵

6. Popular music is recognized as a powerful, unifying force. It is seen as a significant component in the process of global integration and the struggle for planetary order. In short, sociologists

believe that today's popular music provides "one of the potential means for the appropriation and conquest of daily life."¹⁶

Modern Music Trends and the End-Time

Believing that we live in the final countdown of the great controversy, it would seem foolish not to probe the possibility that there might be some eschatological significance in these developments—maybe even some masterminded manoeuvre.

As Adventists we believe that the stories of the Book of Daniel are not merely for use in the children's Sabbath School divisions. Rather, they are significant keys to help us understand the large prophetic schemes. For example, the story of the three Hebrew worthies' refusal to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's golden image (Daniel 3) is a cameo illustration of what will one day occur on a global scale when the whole world is commanded on pain of death to worship an image to the beast. Here is a miniature of the time when state and religion will join to force everyone, "small and great, rich and poor, free and bond," to receive the mark of the beast or be put to death.

You remember the story, don't you? The golden image on the Plain of Dura, the fiery furnace prepared for the treacherous, the panoplied Nebuchadnezzar impatiently awaiting the homage of the thousands from all nations who stand before him. The moment of worship comes, but note: the phenomenon that prepares, organizes, and unites the vast throng in this act of false worship is not an announcement from the king or some well-chosen words from the platform—it is music. When the music plays, all must bow.

This is not the first time in Scripture that a connection is made between false worship and music. For example, in the plains of Moab, on the borders of the Promised Land, Israel was beguiled into a terrible apostasy through the influence of music and dance.¹⁷ God's people were lured to bow down and participate in heathen worship—something which they rejected intellectually, and may have resisted under other circumstances.

Music's influence, both on individuals as well as groups, is very apparent. From the study of music in cultures the world around, Alan P. Merriam observed that: "The importance of music, as judged by the sheer ubiquity of its presence, is enormous. . . . There is

probably no other human cultural activity which is so all-pervasive and which reaches into, shapes, and often controls so much of human behavior."¹⁸

More specifically, psychologist Oliver Sacks wrote: "The power of music. . . is of the greatest practical and theoretical importance. . . . What we see, fundamentally, is the power of music to organize—and to do this efficaciously. . . when abstract or schematic forms of organization fail. Indeed, it is especially dramatic, as one would expect, precisely when no other form of organization will work."¹⁹

It would seem evident that in order to unify socially all nations for his final deception, our arch enemy cannot depend solely on political ideologies, economic treaties, and even theological interpretations. But, it could be that he has been carefully planning and developing a powerful "social glue" in the form of music, something that could provide the means for emotionally unifying and organizing the world's inhabitants—squeezing them into a mold²⁰—for the final act of worship, just as he did on a micro scale 2500 years ago in Babylon.

In 1835 in a kind of visionary manifesto about religious music of the future, the renowned Western musician and musical thought leader Franz Liszt called for art to leave the precincts of the church and seek a stage for its magnificent manifestations in the outside world. He posited a new "humanistic music" that would "sum up both the THEATER and the CHURCH" and ultimately allow "all classes of people" to be "joined together in a common, religious, grand and sublime feeling." (Emphasis is Liszt's own.) He yearned for the day when art would "raise itself to its ultimate heights by fraternally uniting all mankind in rapturous wonder."²¹ Today, sociologists acknowledge that music is the only known social factor of its kind that can bring together people from all nations and backgrounds in such common interest and commitment.

Further, as leading ethnomusicologist David McAllester observed, music seems to "be the clearest reinforcement of identity we have."²² Could it be that by fostering a homogenized global musical style—a style that is increasingly visible in the Christian music culture—the stage is being set for a global, religious identity response? A response that will allow people of all nations, all religious backgrounds to say, "Yes, this is my music, this is who I

am: this is my music for being happy an religious and I am part of it; I am right at home now."²³

Could it be that when the whole world is gathered on the apocalyptic Plain of Dura and the music plays, it will be easier for you and me to capitulate to that almost overmastering temptation to false worship *then*, because we have absorbed the world's music patterns instead of presenting a unique and timely aesthetic witness *now*? Could it be that by pushing music into the endnotes of our theology and thinking, our end note may not be the New Song, the song of Moses and the Lamb as we had hoped?

Endnotes

- 1 Roger L. Dudley with V. Bailey Gillespie, *Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance* (La Sierra University Press, 1992), p. 148.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 149.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 163.
- 4 H. R. Rookmaaker, *Art Needs No Justification* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), p. 20.
- 5 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 1 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1948), p. 506.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1958), p. 595.
- 7 Deanna Campbell Robinson, "Youth and Popular Music: A Theoretical Rationale for an International Study," *Gazette: International Journal for Mass Communication Studies* 37 (1986): 41, 49.
- 8 Deanna Campbell Robinson et. al., *Music at the Margins: Popular Music and Global Cultural Diversity* (London: Sage Publications, 1991), x-xi.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 Bruno Nettl, *The Western Impact on World Music: Change, Adaption and Survival* (New York: Schirmer, 1985), p. 85.
- 11 Simon Frith, ed., *World Music, Politics and Social Change* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1989), p. 2.
- 12 Cees Hamelink, *Cultural Autonomy in Global Communications: Planning National Information Policy* (New York: Longman, 1983), p. 4.
- 13 Robinson et. al., *Music at the Margins*, pp. 42-43.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 240.
- 16 Ian Chambers, "Some Critical Tracks," *Popular Music* 2 (1986): 19.
- 17 White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 454.
- 18 Alan P. Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 218.
- 19 Quoted in Andrews Stiller, "Toward a Biology of Music," *Opus* (August 1987): 12-14.
- 20 Compare Romans 12:2 (Philips translation).
- 21 Franz Liszt, "Religious Music of the Future," in *An Artist's Journey: Lettres d'un bachelier ès musique 1835-1841*, by Franz Liszt, trans. and annotated by Charles Suttoni (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 236-237; and Mark Bangert, "Church Music History, Classic and Romantic," in *Key Words in Church Music: Definition Essays on Concepts, Practices and Movements of Thought in Church Music*, ed. Carl Schalk (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1978), pp. 132-133.

22 David P. McAllester, "Music as Ecumenical Force," *The Australian Journal of Music Education* 27 (October 1980): 10.

23. A paraphrase of statement by Alan Lomax quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Dr. Pfandl shows that "the time of the end" refers in the book of Daniel to the consummation of the history of the world in an apocalyptic setting. This phrase refers to the final period of time leading up to the absolute end of the present world.

Every careful student of the book of Daniel must confront himself/herself with this thorough study. It is a must for all who wish to understand what the goals of the book of Daniel are on its own terms.

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