

**THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC
A STUDY OF BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF MUSIC**

**This book is authored by seven scholars
and consists of 14 chapters**

**Chapter 11
ROCK MUSIC
AND
EVANGELISM
by
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Shakespeare's dictum, "To be or not to be," can be paraphrased today to read "To rock or not to rock." The battle over whether or not rock music should be used for church worship and evangelism is being fought across denominational lines. This is true not only in America but also in many Western countries, including my own country of Germany.

The use of rock music, especially at Adventist youth rallies in Germany, is creating enormous polemics. For example, on June 19, 1999, a youth rally was organized in Nurnberg which was attended by 1,900 people. A rap song was played for the special music before the sermon.

While some of the youth were delighted by that music, others sent letters of protest to the conference and union officers, who apologized for what had happened. Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident as Adventist rock bands have become a regular feature at youth rallies.

Some Adventist CCM artists—rock, pop and gospel singers—passionately defend the use of their music for church worship and evangelistic outreach.¹ Others strongly protest against what they perceive to be the music of Babylon. Contenders on both sides of both sides of the music debate are pondering their strategies in order to win converts to their cause.

The ongoing debate affects me deeply because music has always been the passion of my life. For the past 15 years I have served, first, as Chairman of the Music Department of the Adventist College and Theological Seminary at Collonges-sous-Salève in France (1985-1995), and, then, as Music Director of the SDA Baden-Wuerttemberg Conference in Germany (1995-2000). I am one of the founders of the European “Adventist Music Society” (1999). The recent invasion of loud pop music into our Adventist churches, especially at youth rallies, has caused me to spend countless hours examining rock music from social, moral, physiological, psychological, and biblical perspectives. This essay represents a brief summary of some aspects of my research.

Objective of This Chapter. This chapter addresses this fundamental question: Can rock music, in whatever form, be used to keep youth within the church and to reach out to secular-minded people outside the church?

It would be presumptuous to assume that this chapter provides the definitive answer to such a hotly debated issue. The best I can hope for is to stimulate a constructive dialogue among church musicians, youth leaders, and administrators. In addressing this divisive issue, it is imperative to learn to disagree without becoming disagreeable to one another.

The chapter is divided in two parts. The first part defines the terms and the issues of the current debate over the use of rock music. The second part focuses specifically on the use of rock music to evangelize the secular-minded people, especially the young. Special attention is given to some of the popular arguments used to defend the use of rock music in evangelism.

Part 1
DEFINING THE ISSUES

A meaningful analysis of the current debate over the use of rock music for church worship and evangelism presupposes an understanding of the issues involved and of the meaning of the terms used. Thus we attempt first to define the major terms and concepts around which the debate revolves.

Sacred Music. A good place to start is with the definition of “sacred music.” There are those who contend that music per se is neither sacred or secular—it is a neutral thing.² For them, what makes music “sacred” is not its style, but its lyrics. This popular view is flawed both historically, theologically, and scientifically. Historically, it ignores the fact that the music performed at the Temple, synagogue, and early church was different from the music played at social events for entertainment. As shown in Chapter 7, “Biblical Principles of Music,” the music and the instruments associated with dancing and entertainment were excluded from the Jewish and Christian places of worship.

Theologically, the notion that music is a neutral thing is negated by the Christian call to sanctification (1 Thess 5:23)—a call that encompasses all the realms of life, including music. Sanctification presupposes a separation from the world in order to be set aside and consecrated to the service of God. Whatever is used for the service of God is sacred, that is, set aside for holy use. This is true not only of music but of speech as well. The profane language used in the street is inappropriate in church. In the same way, rock music used in bars or nightclubs to stimulate people physically cannot be used in the church to elevate people spiritually.

From a biblical perspective, mixing the sacred with the profane is an abomination to the Lord (Prov 15:8; 15:26; Is 1:13; Mal 2:11). To use the rock idiom in the church or in evangelism means “to offer strange fire before the Lord” (Lev 10:1), or, as the New English version renders it, “unauthorized fire.” Paul emphasizes this principle: “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them” (Eph 5:11).

Scientifically, the notion that music is neutral is discredited by research on the physiological, psychological, and social effects of music. The “neutralists” could be likened to the members of “The Flat Earth Society.” They should try their theory on music therapists, psychologists,

behavioral scientists, or even on surgeons and dentists who use music as an anesthetic. The power of music to alter the mind and affect the body is a well-established scientific fact.

Sacred music reflects the majesty, harmony, purity, and holiness of God in its melody, harmony, rhythm, text, and performance practices. Its goal is not to entertain or draw attention to the performer's ability, but to glorify God and to inspire believers to conform to the image of God. This is true also of evangelistic music which focuses on God's saving grace and its transforming power in the life of penitent sinners.

Rock Music. Defining rock music is a most difficult task because, during its half-century of existence, it has generated a whole tribe of children and grandchildren. The old "Stones" are still "Rolling," and they have become the literal grandfathers of the newest techno and rap freaks. The old man, called "Rock 'n' Roll," married all kinds of famous women who have given birth to milk-and-coffee babies, such as jazz-rock, classic-rock, latin-rock, polit-rock, and others.

No drug has been left untouched leading to psychedelic, acid rock, and ecstasy-punched rave parties. Techno freaks claim that "their" music is a world of its own, not just another "rock" style. In reality, however, Techno shares the common characteristics of rock music and sets new records in noise, tempo, and ecstatic effects.

The basic musical elements of rock, including "Christian" rock, are volume, repetition, and beat. It is a music designed not to be heard, but to be felt, to be drowned in. "Turn on, dive in and drop out" is the motto and the effect searched for. Its main instruments are amplified electrical guitars, electrical bass, drum set with a dominating one-beat, often accentuated on the second and the fourth beat. Keyboard instruments like piano and synthesizers are often added.

Rock music conveys a physically driven feeling called "groove." This feeling is caused by a slight difference in timing between the main "one-beat" in the drums and the "offbeat" effect of the other instruments or the singers. This "groove feeling" compels people to dance. Some "bang" it out with the whole body.

Rock singing does not use the techniques of classical music based on a relaxed larynx and rich harmonic overtones. Instead, it employs high-pitched strained voicing, using "shout and scat" techniques in order to obtain a top level of emotional touch. The lyrics are secondary to the music.

Scientists speak about “signal listening,”³ which means that the mention of a word or a short phrase suffices to evoke the topic and to stir up the listener’s emotions. Each one of the hundreds of different youth culture groups have their own “signal” vocabulary.

Most rock music does not seek a balance in composition among the melody, harmony, and rhythm. The music is dominated by a relentless rhythmic beat and general loudness which are designed to penetrate the bodies of the listeners with emotional stimulation, while disconnecting, at least in part, their master brain.⁴ Gotthard Fermor, a German Protestant theologian who is a strong defender of “Christian” rock, acknowledges that all the elements of rock music are designed to generate an agitated trance.⁵

The capacity of rock music to alter the mind and stimulate the body raises an important question: Can the rock idiom, in whatever version, be legitimately used to worship God in the church and to evangelize the unsaved outside the church? The conclusion of this investigation is NO, for the simple reason that the *medium affects the message*. The medium we use to worship God and proclaim the Gospel determines the quality of our evangelistic efforts and the nature of the message to which people are won.

Contemporary Christian Music. To define Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) is not an easy task, because it comes in a variety of species like the famous 57 brands of Heinz soup. Not all CCM is rock music, although the two are often confounded. It is estimated that about ninety percent of CCM comes in a wide variety of rock styles. The multicolored spectrum of this industry reaches out from the “pastel” of folk, youth-choir music, country, chanson, ballad, gospel, to the “brighter tones” of folk rock, country rock, gospel rock, and, finally, the incredible “blinding colors” of Christian hard core, heavy metal and techno.

Between these extremes is the “glitter” of rap, hip-hop, latin, reggae—all “sanctified” through “Christian” lyrics and an ever-increasing audience of believers and unbelievers. Major Christian bookstores have a large section on music that usually is divided into the following categories: *Contemporary*, which includes every type of popular music; *Praise Worship*, which covers a wide range of rock styles; *Rap*, *Country*, *Hard*, *Alternative*, *Techno-Drive*, the last three of which include harsh rock styles such as punk, metal, ska, retro, industrial, etc.; *Southern Gospel and Black Gospel*, which incorporate a wide variety of heavy beat music.

Musically speaking, most “Christian” rock is no different from secular rock, except for the lyrics. All the various styles of rock from soft rock to hard rock, acid rock, punk rock, metal rock, rap, etc., are available in a “Christian” version. The deception is self evident. Christians addicted to the secular rock beat can satisfy their craving for rock just by listening to a “Christian” version.

Related to CCM, and dependent upon it, is Contemporary Worship Music (CWM). Many of the same artists involved in CCM are also active in CWM, often recording in the same secular corporations. The significant difference is in the lyrics, which are more biblically based. An example is the song “How Majestic Is Your Name” by Michael W. Smith. Mainly it represents a type of soft rock. Two major problems with CWM is that it generally incorporates rock rhythms with a heavy bass line and is very repetitious. Jesus warned against using vain repetitions in worship (Matt 6:7). This type of music is adopted by more and more Adventist young people who are organizing bands and, in some cases, achieving professional status.⁶

Liberals Versus Conservatives. The debate over the use of modified rock music in church worship and evangelism involves two groups. On the one side are the so-called “Liberals,” who say: “We must keep our youth in the church”; “We must update”; “We must use new methods to reach the secular mind.” The Liberals tend to overemphasize God’s love and forgiveness in order to justify the use of questionable methods of evangelism.

On the other side of the debate are the so-called “Conservatives,” who say: “Do the youth dictate what we are to do?” “Where is the message of the Bible when we lower our standards?”; “Can we convert the world by bringing worldly music into the church?”

”Liberals” accuse “Conservatives” of being “Puritan body haters.” “You cannot bear enjoyment,” they say. In some cases, the criticism is valid. Some “conservatives” view the Christian life as gloom and doom. They label as sinful any legitimate expression of joyful excitement. This is not right because Christians, who have experienced Christ’s redeeming grace, have reason to shout for joy.

The real issue behind the whole debate is the method of interpreting the Bible. While the “Conservatives” are sometimes accused of

interpreting Paul's warnings against worldliness too narrowly, the "Liberals" can be accused of taking David's dance out of context in order to justify rock evangelism. Each side tends to find rational and biblical reasons for their positions.

Part 2

ROCK MUSIC AND EVANGELISM

To define the role of music in evangelism is problematic for two major reasons, one biblical and the other contemporary. From a biblical perspective, music is never used as a medium for evangelizing the Gentiles. The only Bible text which could be twisted to support a form of music evangelism is Acts 16:25, where we are told that Paul and Silas, while languishing in a jail at Philippi, were "singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them."

We are not told whether the singing was intended as a witness to the prisoners or as an expression of confidence in God's protection. Most likely both motives were present. Whatever the motives were, this text offers little insight into the apostolic use of music for evangelism.

In the rest of the Bible, music is always presented in the context of the worship of God and not of evangelistic outreach to the Gentiles. As shown in Chapter 7, the music in the Temple was "sacrifice-centered," praising God for the provision of salvation through the sacrificial offering. In the synagogue, the music was "Word-centered," praising the Lord by chanting the very words of Scripture.

In the early church, music was "Christ-centered," extolling Christ's redemptive accomplishment. Any evangelistic impact of the worship music was indirect. Gentiles who heard God's people singing in some instances may have been attracted and converted to the worship of the true God. No explicit indications, however, suggest that music was ever used as a means to attract Gentiles to the Christian faith.

Ecumenical Music. From a contemporary perspective, the role of music in evangelism is a problem because ecumenism discourages proselytizing among Christian churches. Today evangelism is defined more in terms of interconfessional communion than of proclamation of the Gospel as understood by different denominations. Christian rock artists, stem-

ming from different churches, espouse virtually the same expression of a minimal Gospel. Doctrinal differences do not really matter and should not be expressed in song. What matters is joining together in praising the Lord. Even the whole “pop life style” is often regarded by theologians as something “authentic” that should be accepted rather than condemned.⁷

Evangelistic music, instead of bringing people from the world to Christ, often brings the world’s agenda into the church, thus undermining the identity and mission of the church. Music, in general, and evangelistic rock music, in particular, stand in danger of becoming a sign of the times by participating in the destruction of the very Christian values it wants to communicate.

Evangelistic Music Versus Church Music. Many believe that evangelistic music should be different from church music because its goal is to reach people where they are. This creates a gap between evangelistic and worship music, which, if not properly controlled, can ultimately result in the establishment of new churches characterized by their new worship styles. The process can be graphically described.

First, there is the conviction that secularized people must be reached by means familiar to them (“pick them up where they are”). By doing this, a gap is created between the music service at the evangelistic crusade and that of the weekly worship service at the church. This leads to the *second* step which involves changing the old-fashioned worship style at the church into a new “modern” style in order to accommodate the secular-minded people who are brought into the church.

The result is step *three*, when societal trends set the agenda for the church which becomes caught in a never-ending race trying to keep up with the latest fad. Today the church chooses “Christian” rock music, tomorrow it will adopt “Christian” drama, and the following day “Christian” lottery or gambling. Incidentally, all of these activities are already taking place within some churches. The end result is that the evangelistic rock music that was intended to reach and change the people of the world ultimately transforms the church itself into the likeness of the world.

But the spiral of change does not stop here. The *fourth* step occurs when pluralism develops within each denomination. Groups sharing the same tastes organize themselves in separate congregations. Then comes the last step when different churches with the same worship styles approach each other to form a new denomination.

New Worship-Style Denominations. Today a number of new denominations have come into existence, not because of the discovery of new biblical truths, but because of new worship styles that better satisfy the expectations of the baby-boomer generation. The market-driven “seeker-churches” and the “body-oriented” charismatic movements constitute new brands of evangelism that claim to be role models for the Christian world to follow.

The issue is no longer dogmatic unity but worship unity.⁸ Music becomes more important than biblical teachings, because the goal is to give people what they want to experience now rather than what they need to know to become citizens of God’s eternal Kingdom.

This process helps us understand why the adoption of pop music is becoming a hot issue within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Many of its members fear that the adoption of a new style of worship, driven by pop music, ultimately will undermine the church’s prophetic claim. They are concerned that if the current trend continues, Adventists, who are known as “the people of the Book,” eventually will become known as “the people of rock,” like many contemporary evangelical churches.

The solution to the dilemma is to be found not in eliminating any distinction between evangelistic and church music, but in keeping the two in close proximity. There is a need for a “decrescendo” of musical styles in each evangelistic meeting, from a more lively type of music to more meditative music, which predisposes people to reflect on the truths of God’s Word presented at the meetings.

Two Strategies. The debate over whether “to rock or not to rock” in evangelism largely stems from two opposite strategies. One strategy is “Message-oriented”—the church must preach the message of salvation without looking for results that could be generated by the use of pop music. The second strategy is “Seeker-friendly,” believing that it must adopt the idiom of the people to be reached.

The “Seeker-friendly” Christians defend the use of rock music in evangelism because they believe that rock is part of today’s culture and thus is needed to penetrate the rock generation. They justify their strategy by referring to Jesus who has sent us into the world (John 17:18), and to Paul, who said: “To those outside the law I became as one outside the law” (1 Cor. 9:21). Unfortunately, they ignore the second half of the verse: “not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ” (1 Cor. 9:21).

“The law of Christ” did not allow Paul to use the popular Greek choral songs or Roman plays to reach the masses.

Had Paul been a “Seeker-friendly” strategist who was determined to reach the masses using their philosophical or musical idioms, then he should have become a popular evangelist, drawing capacity crowds wherever he went. But this was hardly the case. In his letters he tells us that almost everywhere he met opposition, persecution, even stoning sometimes. To survive, he often fled from place to place. The reason is that Paul chose to preach the Gospel, not by couching it in the popular idioms of the Roman culture, but by proclaiming it in clear and compelling words.

With prophetic insight Paul warned that in the last days some will adopt a compromising strategy. “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings” (2 Tim 4:3). The mention of “itching ears” reminds one of the use of pop music today to satisfy the “itching ears” of the rock generation.

On the opposite side, we have today the “Message-oriented” Christians who carefully analyze any innovative method before using it, because for them what counts is the proclamation of the message. “We are to preach, not to look for success,” they say. Jesus was also almost alone at the end, yet His apparent defeat became His greatest victory.

A negative attitude toward innovative methods that can enrich church worship and improve the effectiveness of the evangelistic outreach is deplorable. Christ Himself was a keen observer of the culture of His people and borrowed from it valuable object lessons for his teaching. Like Christ, we need to be sensitive to the contemporary culture, including music, and borrow whatever can be legitimately used to reach men and women with the message of salvation.

Music and Culture. The music used in church and in evangelism must be sensitive to culture. This is true not only in Western countries but also in developing countries, where, sometimes, missionaries ignore the native music and expect the people to learn and adopt Anglo hymns. That raises a question: Is the music of our worship services and evangelistic campaigns serving only the prevailing culture or enhancing also the content of the message? Our goal should be to meet both objectives. We need to carefully analyze the culture and borrow those elements that can enhance the preaching of the full message. God’s message needs to be

heard in a way that is relevant to people, but it must not be distorted by idioms like rock music, that contradict its values.

Evangelistic music needs to be both “Seeker-friendly” and “Message-oriented.” It needs to be understood by the listener, but it must not distort the message. Evangelistic music can borrow valuable material from everywhere (from the past and from other countries), but it must avoid the music that fails to portray the beauty of Christ’s character and the seriousness of the whole plan of salvation. Most rock music fails to give a “sacred shiver.”

Evangelistic music must reflect Christ’s courage in confronting the culture of His time with the principles of God’s Kingdom. Christ did not meet the expectations of His contemporaries, not even those of His disciples. Similarly, Paul summons believers to confront the world with the principles of the Gospel, rather than conforming to its values (Rom 12:1).

The use of rock music in evangelism should be avoided because it reminds young people of their rebellious past. It can serve as a regression tool towards their own childhood, as psychologists explain it.

By using rock in evangelism, Christians contribute to the general increase of physical stimulations and aggressiveness.¹⁰ Happiness is mixed with erotic undertones and joy with aggressiveness.¹¹ We should be messengers of God’s real joy and peace.

The use of rock in evangelism is inappropriate, not only because its values are inimical to the Christian faith, but also because it represents a pantheistic and syncretistic form of religion which invites its followers to plug into the supernatural by means of dance, sex, and drugs. Using such a medium in evangelism is like introducing “strange fire” in God’s House.

Rock Music Draws the Crowds. A major argument used to defend the use of rock music in evangelism is the fact that it draws huge crowds at pop Gospel concerts. No one disputes this fact. But this is hardly surprising since rock has become an indispensable part of today’s youth culture. Many teenagers are so immersed in rock music that a Gospel concert where this music is played provides them with an outlet to enjoy their music without the condemnation of their parents or church.

Pop Gospel concerts do not call enough for spiritual or moral commitment. They mainly offer young people what they want—entertainment. Pop gospel musician John Allen acknowledges the danger of

such concerts: “It seems undeniable that most of the audience is there simply to enjoy the music, not to think hard about anything: and there is a real danger of the emergence of a ‘Greenbelt Christians,’ consisting of semi-converted, shallowly committed teenagers whose Christianity means little more than that the enjoyment of festival-going.”¹²

We live today in a pleasure-oriented society, when people have a much greater appetite for what is amusing and pleasing than for what is edifying. Empiric research has shown that adolescents tend to listen less and less carefully even to their own music.¹³ It is becoming increasingly difficult to motivate people to attend meetings where the only attraction is God and the study of His Word. But this must never become an excuse for giving people what they want.

Our biblical mandate is to present to people what they need to hear: God’s plan and expectations for their lives. The claim that rock music draws the crowds is irrelevant from a biblical perspective. Our real concern is to be true to principle, not to be popular.

If apostolic Christianity was to be judged by the number of people converted, then it was hardly a successful movement. Why? Because by the end of the first century, all the evangelistic efforts conducted over a period of almost seventy years, had converted only about 0.6 percent of the population of the Roman empire. This amounted to one million Christians in a population of about 181 million.¹⁴ By contrast, in the fourth century when Christianity became a popular movement and pagans entered the church by the thousands, the result was spiritual decline and apostasy of the church. This shows that numbers can be deceptive. Massive conversions sometimes bespeak of spiritual decline and apostasy.

Only Rock Music Reaches Teenagers. We hear people constantly saying: “Teenagers today will not come to church. We can only reach them with rock music.” Is this true? Surprisingly, there are many evangelical churches where no rock music is played, and yet they are filled with young people. Could it be that those who are clamoring for rock music are not the *unsaved* after all?

John Blanchard raises these pointed questions: “Is it true that it is the *unsaved* who insist on the music? Or is it nearer the truth to say that it is young *Christians* who enjoy it so much that they insist on it? Is it true that the unconverted friends of Christians adamantly refuse to attend any evangelistic presentation except a musical one? Or is it truer to say that

they are almost never asked? Isn't it true that young Christians invite friends to Gospel concerts as a first resort rather than as a last resort?"¹⁵

If the reports are correct that thousands of young people are saved every year through "Christian" rock music, then one wonders where they are? If the claim about mass conversion made by so many rock groups is correct, then we should see a noticeable decrease in violence, drug use, civil disobedience, and premarital sex. Unfortunately, this is not the case. The reality is that this music of entertainment confirms patterns of aggressiveness and violence.

Rock Music Produces Excellent Results. Promoters of "Christian" rock music claim that God is blessing their efforts and thousands of young people are saved. Mylon LeFevre, known as "The Solid Rocker," claims that tens of thousands have signed their decision card at his concerts: "There are 52,000 people who have signed a little cards that says, 'Tonight, for the first time, I understand who Jesus is and how He does things, and I want Him to be my Lord.'"¹⁶

The popular Christian press reports similar accounts of mass "decisions" registered at pop Gospel concerts. We are thankful for every soul who is saved regardless of the method of evangelism. There is no reason to doubt that some of the rock bands are genuinely concerned for the salvation of young people through their music and concerts. But the fact that God uses such means to save people is not of itself an indication that every means that works is biblically valid. I believe that people are saved, not because of Christian rock, but *in spite of it*.

Franky Schaeffer perceptively points out: "The excuse that 'sometimes people are saved' is no excuse at all. People have been saved in concentration camps because God can bring good from evil, but this does not justify the evil."¹⁷ Moses obtained excellent results when he struck the rock at Kadesh-barnea and produced enough water for all the Israelites and their livestock (Num 20:1-20). Yet God punished him for what he did.

Evangelistic methods must be tested, not by their results, but by their faithfulness to biblical principles. When evangelism is not controlled by biblical teaching, then it becomes a performance in manipulative skills, rather than a manifestation of the power of truth. True salvation comes through the proclamation of true doctrine. A corrupted or watered down presentation of the Gospel through a rock concert makes the decisions suspect.

Paul Blanchard reports on a survey of 1,829 young people conducted by his organization in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. The young people came from seven major denominations. “The poll indicated that of the 1,829 young people concerned, only thirty-nine, or 2.1%, were converted at a Gospel concert. (Even this tiny figure almost certainly gives an exaggerated picture; the poll did not ask whether the musical presentation was the specific means of conversion).”¹⁸

The reports of mass “decisions” for Christ made at pop Gospel concerts are suspect, not only because of the message but also because of the atmosphere created by the music itself. Powerful music can produce emotional decisions, but a biblical conversion is not the result of an emotional, unthinking response. It involves a genuine repentance wrought by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the biblical Gospel.

At most pop Gospel concerts, the music is so loud and raucous that the words are hardly heard. How can the Gospel be presented in its convicting power when the words can hardly be heard? This exposes the contradiction of the defenders of “Christian” rock. On the one hand, they claim that the lyrics make the music Christian, yet, on the other hand, the lyrics can hardly be heard. If they were serious about their claim, they would reduce the volume of the instrumental music so that the message of the songs could be heard clearly and distinctly.

The big question is whether rock music really communicates the Gospel without distortion. After all, it is vitally important for the Gospel to be biblically received. The acceptance of the Gospel presupposes the use of the *mind*. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your *mind*” (Mark 12:30). In view of the fact that in biblical psychology, heart, soul, and mind are used interchangeably to refer to the intellect, the mental response to God is paramount. Rock music, however, is designed to be felt, not to be heard. Its appeal is to the body and not to the mind. How then can a person understand the Gospel through rock when its music bypasses the mind? The rock fan may understand the rock signals (whatever they mean), but he can hardly understand the Gospel.

Practical Suggestions for Youth Rallies. In planning for youth rallies like concerts or music festivals, several considerations should be kept in mind. First of all, the motivation of the event should not be to imitate the popular rock scene. We need to seek healthy

alternatives to the music played in discotheques and night clubs. Of course, friends can and should be invited, but they should be informed about the special nature of the event.

In planning for the music program, two considerations should be kept in mind. What thought associations will the music produce and what will be the possible physical impact? Organizers should ensure that the music is played with moderate loudness.¹⁹ A pleasant but sober atmosphere should characterize the meeting. Emphasis should be on a strong spiritual message, and on congregational singing rather than on performing bands. Creative playfulness should be a self-evident fact and reality. Young people need to experiment. We must inspire and challenge the youth, while being open to some unusual results. But youth leaders should never abandon their responsibility of providing loving guidance.

The volume of the instruments accompanying the singing should be very moderate. They should support the singing and not supplant it. Often I have seen that young people do not become enthusiastically involved in singing is because the music is too loud and they cannot hear their voices. The song leader directing the congregational singing should ensure that the musicians follow his directives in keeping the volume under control.

Clapping, tapping, and swinging are out of place in the church, but they could be allowed in a moderate way at outdoor rallies. Great care should be taken, however, to prevent the unruly behavior characteristic of rock concerts, with stamping, whistling, yelling, etc. The instrumentalists, the song leader, and the speakers should work together to ensure that the singing and the preaching reflect the distinctive characteristic of Adventist meetings. Times of joy should alternate with times of meditation, and even quietness.

The program should start with fresh and lively music to arouse interest and establish a good contact with the people. The function of the music is to serve as a servant of the Word. Simple heart-to-heart preaching and short biblical messages should be the main emphasis in any youth evangelistic program. At the end, the music should be calmer and meditative, inviting the youth to renew their commitment to the Lord.

Youth cultures split into more and more different global cells such as bikers, surfers, fun sporters, etc. Each one has its own musical language. This offers an opportunity to create specific Christian or Evangelical or Adventist musical subculture. Convincing presentations will at least reach the earnest seekers among today's youth.

Musicians, pastors, and teachers should gather young people around them and plan together how to create an authentic Adventist music program suitable for church service and evangelism. They should take the time to choose together appropriate music for the occasion. Classical music presented with enthusiasm and quality can still impress young people. The same goes for carefully performed folk styles.²⁰

CONCLUSION

The search for an effective way to reach secular-minded people with the Gospel has led many church leaders and musicians to adopt various versions of rock music for communicating the Christian message. We commend the motives of these people, but we question the legitimacy of their method for several reasons.

Rock music is not a neutral vehicle for Christian lyrics. The music itself is a powerful language. Rock music in evangelism works on imagination and on thought associations, as any music. But rock music misrepresents the claims of the Gospel by encouraging worldly values. It makes people believe that they are all right, when in reality they desperately need a radical change in their lives—a conversion experience. As a medium which promotes instant gratification, violence, drugs, sex, and pantheistic self-redemption, rock music perverts the message of the Gospel simply because the medium affects the message.

Rock music in evangelism undermines the effort to construct a strong moral foundation in the youth. Instead of promoting self-control, temperance, respect for authority, and purity, it teaches self-indulgence, intemperance, disobedience, pleasure seeking, and immature behavior.

Rock music impairs the discriminatory sense of right and wrong built within our conscience. The constant puffing up of emotions destroys guilt barriers. It wraps people up in a guiltless and shameless self-satisfaction that ultimately makes the recognition of evil impossible. Christ calls for the recognition of our lostness in order that we might receive His gracious provision of salvation. Listeners should capture a glimpse of divine awe in order to sense God's calling to a complete commitment, to a change in life-style, including music habits.

Rock evangelism confirms the “rock religion” which fosters a mixture of half-conscious religious feelings and behaviours that tend towards ecstasy and the occult. It is imperative for Christians to keep a safe distance from such idolatrous practices.

Rock music also has a strong physical impact mainly through its volume and pounding beat. The music needs to be loud in order to be “felt” by the listeners. The pounding beat of rock leads to dancing, stamping, or head banging. The result of this heavy load of sound energy is that the mind switches off and leaves the field to the emotions to take over. Christians should not allow their minds to be impaired by sounds or drugs, because it is through their minds that they honor God by living sanely and soberly.

God’s proven method of evangelism is the “foolishness of preaching” (1 Cor 1:21). He has committed to us the message of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18). Our responsibility is not to contaminate this message with worldly idioms, like rock music. There is no need for the manipulation and stimulation of rock music to save people. Evangelism has been and is greatly aided by Christlike music presented by Christlike performers; but ultimately, it is the proclamation of the Word of God, accompanied by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, that brings people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. May our evangelistic efforts be centered on the Rock of Ages, rather than on the rock music of our age.

 ENDNOTES

1. The individual testimonies are impressive. Jeff Trubey, “Making Waves,” *Adventist Review* (July 17, 1997), pp. 8 -13.

2. John Blanchard, *Pop Goes the Gospel: Rock in the Church* (Durham, England, 1991), p. 24.

3. See, Dörte Hartwich-Wiechell, *Pop-Music* (Köln, 1974), p. 30. She speaks of the small units that people need in order to be stimulated by pop music.

4. Wolf Müller-Limmroth, “Neurophysiologische und psychomentele Wirkungen der Musik” (“Neurophysiological and Psychomental Effects of Music”), in *Musik und Medizin 2* (1975), p. 14.

5. Gotthard Fermor, “Das religiöse Erbe in der Popmusik—musik—und religionswissenschaftliche Perspektiven” (“The Religious Heritage in Pop Music—Perspectives from Musicology and Religious Sociology”), in: Wolfgang Kabus (ed.), *Populärmusik, Jugendkultur und Kirche (Popular Music, Youth Culture and Church)* (Frankfurt, Germany, 2000), p. 44. (Lecture at the Youth Music Workshop in Friedensau, May 8, 1997).

6. See, Jeff Trubey (note 1).

7. See several contributions to the volume on popular music, youth culture, and church, ed. Wolfgang Kabus, an German Adventist church music professor: *Populärmusik, Jugendkultur und Kirche* (Bern, Switzerland, 2000).

8. Michael S. Hamilton, “The Triumph of the Praise Songs,” *Christianity Today* (July 12, 1999), pp. 29-30.

9. Josef Hoffmann (a psychoanalyst), “Popmusik, Pubertät, Narzissmus,” *Psyche* 11 (1988), pp. 961-980. He sees rock music, but also narcissism (self-centeredness) and merging with the cosmos, as positive tools in becoming an adult. The high tenor voice and the screaming of the rock singers expresses a “grandiose self,” the mixing of father, mother, and babe, and the pounding beat would guide the industrialized world into adulthood.

10. Michael Kneissler, “Unser Gehirn baut sich soeben radikal um!” (“Our brain is rebuilding itself radically”), *P.M.* (a weekly journal) 11 (1993), pp. 14-20, relating the research of over 25 years of the *Münchener Gesellschaft für Rationelle Psychologie* [Society for Efficient Psychology, Munich] under the direction of Henner Ertel.

11. Microphones allow the singer to come directly into the intimate zone of the listener. See on eroticism, Frank Garlock & Kurt Woetzel, *Music in the Balance* (Greenville, SC, 1992), pp. 92-97.

12. John Blanchard (note 2), p. 98.

13. Klaus-Ernst Behne, a German musicologist, has conducted an internationally recognized study of 150 adolescents between the ages of 11 to 17, and found an alarming tendency towards a decline of sensitivity towards music. "The development of 'Musikerleben' ['the perception and experience of music'] in adolescence—How and why young people listen to music," in I. Deliege and J. Sloboda, *Perception and Cognition of Music* (Hove, England, 1997), pp. 143-159. Musical taste is well established already at 11 years of age and does not change considerably. Concentrated and conscious music listening declines rapidly as time goes on.

14. See, David B. Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Study of Churches and Religions in the Modern World A. D. 1900-2000* (Oxford, England, 1982), p. 3.

15. John Blanchard (note 2), p. 145.

16. Cited by John Styll, "Mylong LeFevre: The Solid Rocker," *CCM Magazine* (March 1986), p. 6.

17. F. Schaeffer, *Addicted to Mediocrity* (New York, 1965), p. 22.

18. John Blanchard (note 2), p. 109.

19. My own measurement of the volume at Christian youth rallies indicates that the levels frequently reach beyond 100 decibels. This is higher than the 90 to 95 decibels the German government commission recommends as the upper limit for discoteques. See, *Zeitschrift für Lärmbekämpfung* [Journal Fighting Noise Pollution] 42 (1995), p. 144.

20. Pierre and Gisela Winandy, "Not All Youth Want Rock," *Adventists Affirm* (Spring 1998), pp. 25-29; John Thurber, "Adventist Youth Prevail with Calm, Dignified Music," *Adventists Affirm* (Spring 1999), pp. 41-47.

21. For the past several years I have examined the literature produced both the by defenders and attackers of "Christian" rock. Some of the significant publications defending the use of "Christian" rock are: Steve Miller, *The Contemporary Christian Music Debate: Worldly Compromise or Agent of Renewal?* (Wheaton, IL, 1993); Dan Peters, Steve Peters, and Cher Merrill, *What About Christian Rock?* (Minneapolis, MN, 1986); John M. Frame, *Contemporary Worship Music: A Biblical*

Defense (Phillipsburg, NJ, 1997); Wolfgang Kabus (Adventist professor of church music, now retired; ed.), *Populärmusik, Jugendkultur und Kirche* (*Popular music, Youth culture and Church*), (Frankfurt, Bern, 2000, “Friedensauer Schriftenreihe” - series of publication from the Adventist University at Friedensau/Germany, vol. 2). This is a highly sociological approach to the study of rock music.