

Young People's Forum (III.6)

Dear Young People,

First of all, the Lord willing, we will soon be seeing you face to face. Although we are scheduled to leave home December 25, we plan to spend one week with Rev. and Mrs. Kley in the Philippines. That means we hope to arrive in Singapore sometime November 1 or 2 – I can't remember which date it is. It will be good to see you all again.

We are going to continue our discussion of the antithesis. I finished speaking of movies and other dramatic productions. I want, with this letter, to begin a discussion of music. There is good music and there is bad music; a life of the antithesis takes into account the difference and uses and enjoys only good music.

The first matter that needs our attention is that music is a gift of God. It is something that God has created along with the creation of the heavens and the earth. It is a gift of God that was present from the beginning of creation and must also be used for God's glory. It is a gift that belongs not only to this earthly creation, but belongs also to the heavenly creation. We are told in Scripture that the angels play harps in heaven (Rev. 14:2). And there is much singing that goes on in heaven, the singing of a choir of saints and angels (Rev. 14:3, 15:3, 4). The Psalms were written to be sung in the temple in the worship of God. And Paul mentions singing in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16.

The point I want to make in this article, however, is the great power music has over our lives. If it is good music, it has a good influence on us; if it is bad music, it has a bad influence on us. I am not talking now about the lyrics only, the words of a song, but I am talking about music itself.

Even the world recognizes this power of music. There is a poem written by Alexander Pope, the title of which is "Alexander's Feast." The reference to Alexander in the title is to Alexander the Great, the powerful leader of the Medo-Persian Empire that conquered the whole known world in the old dispensation from Greece to India. The poem tells about a great banquet that was held for Alexander and all his generals and sub-rulers. At the banquet a musician played different kinds of music, and Alexander the Great responded to each kind of music with fitting actions. If the music was war-like, Alexander arose from his seat at the table and, pulling his sword out of its sheath, began to wave it about over his head. If the music was sad and played in a minor key, Alexander began to cry. If the music was bouncy, Alexander began to dance, etc. The point of the poem was exactly to show how music affects us.

There are many books written (and we have a few in our Seminary library) that describe the terrible influence jazz, rock, hard rock, and other similar kinds of music has on those who listen to it. Its pounding beat and rhythm, its disregard for harmony, its inherent qualities, all have seriously harmful effects on those who listen to it.

I recently read an article about the fact that bad music can be and is as addictive as drugs. I want to quote from this article at some length. It is found in a Lutheran church paper called, *Christian News*. The article goes as follows.

"Don Lucarini, a former contemporary worship leader, warns that the rock rhythm affects us like a musical drug. Though it may be subtly introduced, the listener soon develops a craving for it. The

flesh demands more and more, just like an addict, and there is no turning back'. (*Why I Left the Contemporary Christian Music Movement* [the author refers to a book he read, HH]) This sets up an inevitable trend away from traditional church music. In chapter 17 of his book, Dan writes, 'In reality, what happens over time is a steady slide down the slippery slope away from all traditional music into the latest, edgiest contemporary styles.' I like Dan's illustration of a slippery slope. I can remember when we were children. We had this particular park where we would go, and it had a very steep grassy slope. And we all had our pieces of cardboard, and with these we would slide down at our own risk. I was probably the littlest of all the kids, and for me it was a pretty scary thing. I remember when you first started off, if you really wanted to stop yourself you could. But if you didn't stop yourself immediately, then pretty soon you would reach the point of no return, and like it or not you would wind up at the bottom of the hill. That's exactly what its like when a conservative church once begins to dabble in CCM (Contemporary Christian Music Movement, HH). Like it or not, they will wind up at the bottom of that hill, and they will get there at an alarming rate. Whether you understand it or not, once you begin listening to soft rock, immediately you begin sliding down that slippery slope to the more aggressive forms of rock. This is because the rock ballad begins to orientate the whole way of perceiving music: around rhythm and away from melody. Your musical interests will change. The hymns and songs of the past that seemed such excellent vehicles for worship will suddenly sound dull in comparison to your newly acquired tastes. It's a progression I've seen over and over again in the lives of Christians. It's like a downward spiral. It happens to individuals; it happens to families; it happens to churches. The trend is really all that we would expect, because people are only following their idols as they in turn faithfully follow the world and its trend of ever-increasing musical degradation. In the past 50 years in the West, as our culture has become progressively more fleshly, the musical focus of society has been increasingly dominated by complex, sensual rhythm. So here we are in the 21st century with rap, the world's number-two-selling music format, almost completely devoid of any melody whatsoever. Over time the musical ear has become disorientated. Once it was attuned to melody, but the addictive, sensual rhythms of rock and roll have carried us swiftly down that slippery slope to the place where our ears are now tuned to rhythm, The church, sadly, has followed this same corrupt trend'"

But good music also has many beneficial results. I have many experiences in my life in a busy family and in pastoral work of the truth of this. Let me give you a few examples.

My wife's doctor who delivered our babies told us (and I read articles substantiating this) that the kind of music we played in the home had its effects on babies. Good music could lull them to sleep. Loud, boisterous music could upset them; and so it was. Even if the baby were active before birth, the singing of a Psalm by the mother would frequently calm the unborn baby.

We had children who when barely able to walk would hear band music being played, they began marching around the room as a soldier would march. We had fussy children who were calmed by mother's singing.

More dramatically, my own mother was in a coma for several days before she died. She was extremely restless and needed a nurse at the side of the bed almost constantly. But when my father would recite the old Dutch Psalms to her, she would immediately calm down. The nurses could not understand this. Shortly before he died, my father quoted the last lines of Psalm 68 verse 10 to her. The words go something like this in English: "He can and will and certainly shall give complete deliverance, even when death approaches." To my father's surprise, though remaining in a coma, she said, "Yes, that is right." Now this was only the lyrics of the Psalm, but the tune went through her mind as it did in my father's mind.

In the early years of my ministry a young father of four boys who had only two weeks before been installed into the office of deacon was involved in a terrible truck accident. An oncoming semi truck came over into his side of the road and hit his truck head-on. He suffered irreversible brain damage. He lay in a coma for many days. I visited him every week, but could not get any response from him. Finally, one day, I decided to try singing in his presence, for I knew he loved to sing. I sang Psalter number 203, a Psalter number you all know. When I came to the second verse, "Thy counsel through my earthly way shall guide me and control", he began singing with me. We sang the rest of that verse together and the remaining three verse, and he never missed a word. The nurses who heard our singing came into the room and listened to us with tears streaming down their faces. Though his brain damage was so severe that he could never live home again, he came out of his coma and lived a fairly normal life. He came to church twice every Lord's Day and even served out the rest of his term as deacon – although he could not, of course, make diaconate calls.

There was an old man in the congregation I served, often an elder, who, after I became professor had to go to a nursing home in his old age. Most of the people in that home had dementia or Alzheimer's Disease, but there was one old lady, nearly a hundred years old, who had a good mind, loved the Dutch Psalms, could speak of spiritual things, and talked the same Frisian language this member of the congregation I served, talked. They had much in common. But she was dying. And was also in a coma. The member whom I often visited was saddened by her approaching death and asked the nurse if he could see her one more time before she died. The nurse gave her permission, and he went into the room where she lay near death and in a coma. He said to her in Frisian: "Mem" for that is what he called her; the word means "Grandma") "shall we sing together Psalm 42:1 before you go to heaven?" The old saint sat up in bed and the two of them, with their weak, reedy voices, sang the Dutch version of Psalm 42:1. I often wished I had heard it. But I am sure the angels did. At any rate, when they were finished he said goodbye to her, and she lay back on her bed and died before he was out of the room.

He never told me this story; one of the nurses did.

How can we think that music has no effect on a person when such things repeatedly happen?

We must understand from the beginning of this discussion that music has a powerful effect on us. This is true because music is a gift of God. The corruption of this gift has a powerful effect for evil.

With our love in the Lord,

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