

Sex, drugs, and the fear of secular music



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Sex, Drugs, and the Fear of Secular Music The Christian issue of secular music cycles through society's collective imagination with a precision worthy of the passing of the seasons. Each new generation brings with it a musical style that invokes fear and disgust among the existing Christian traditionalists. Vulgar lyrics and obscene choreography invites the question of whether Christians should be listening to secular music. Yet, no one can adequately define "secular" in reference to music, and the Bible offers little, if any guidance. There are Christian concerts with a floor show that makes "Black Sabbath" look like Sesame Street, while a Yo Yo Ma cello solo is labeled secular because it's played at a Super Bowl half time show. It's important to note that there can be a spiritual lesson in even the most crass music, just as lessons are learned from Christianity's violent past. Even if it could be defined, there is no requirement for Christians to deny themselves all secular activities. Christians need to move beyond trying to label music, accept it that we learn about sin from the sinners, and in this world of diverse secular activities Christians should be listening to secular music. With the exception of Handel's Messiah, there is little agreement on what constitutes Christian music. Some will say it needs to be performed in a church, while others will insist on traditional Christian instruments. The Bible mentions the harp, lyre, and an occasional trumpet, but there is no mention of an electric guitar. Is the organ secular? Others insist that the lyrics must give glory to Christ. Does that make an instrumental performance secular because it lacks Christian lyrics? Nobody can answer these questions with any authority, and since secular music defies definition it also makes it impossible for even the well-intentioned Christian to avoid it.

Everyone knows whether or not any given song is inappropriate for a church

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setting. Some songs are so obscene, void of talent, and lacking in musical content that there is universal agreement that Christians should not listen to it. In fact, some would be banned in most Middle American homes on the basis of bad taste alone. Listening to the “ Rap-de-Jour’s” latest musical tirade of hate reminds us of the religious intolerance that we abhor. We know who those sinners are, because like it or not, we know the history of the Church. We can recognize their sins and identify the sinners. Listening to secular music, even the most radical, gives the listener a point of reference to decide what is immoral and unacceptable.

Christianity does not ban all secular contact in the world. We shop at secular super-markets, work for secular industries, and watch secular TV. Music is just an easy target to generate some emotional response from ultra-conservative Christians. Music is identifiable by the generation it appeals to and it becomes an easy mark to target the young. These are the same young people that are attending a secular school and are active in a secular government. It’s unjust to target music as the only facet of our life that requires a litmus test for faith.

Since the Bible has not offered us any method to describe secular music, attempting to ask Christians not to listen to it runs the risk of asking more than the Bible intended. Ignoring secular music does not put Christians in the best position to recognize it when they hear it. Moses gave us the Ten Commandments, and we can use those to identify the most egregious violations, but our first hand experience with sinners is a deeper well of wisdom. Christians are exposed to and participate in secular activities on a daily basis. In the name of reason and religious tolerance, secular music should be available to and welcomed by all Christians.

Bibliography

The Holy Bible, King James Version. Bible. org. 15 Sept. 2006