



1948 - 2023

21ST WORLD CONGRESS INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF CHRISTIAN CHURCHES

Collingswood, NJ, USA · June 21-28, 2023

POSITION STATEMENT:

Music in the Life of the Christian and the Church

One of the greatest gifts God has given to mankind is music. From Genesis to Revelation we see that music was used in the daily lives of the people and in the worship of God.

With the secularization of our age, the continual advancement in new technologies, our interconnectedness on social media platforms that are not friendly to Bible-believing Christianity, and the failure of many to recognize the importance Scripture places upon godly music, Christian churches and families must be on guard as never before. We must look carefully at the lyrics of our hymns and songs, as well as the instrumentation, melodies, harmonies, rhythms, and other characteristics of the music itself.

God ordained the use of music in the daily lives of His people

For the Children of Israel, music was used in their daily lives for: joyful occasions (1 Chronicles 13:8), the feasts and festivals (Psalm 81:3), for the offering of sacrifices (2 Chronicles 29:27), calling men to battle (Numbers 10:9), celebrating victory (Exodus 15:1; Revelation 15:3); mourning and lamentation (Jeremiah 9:20), to announce important events (Joel 2:1), to call the people together (Numbers 10:2), and for many other purposes. Even music for proper enjoyment and rest must be considered. Very shortly after giving us the account of creation, Moses tells us in Genesis 4:21 that Jubal “was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ.” Music has played a role in the lives of all cultures and civilizations since Creation.

Some of the great events in Biblical history are marked by music. Moses and Miriam sang after Israel passed through the Red Sea (Exodus 15), trumpets sounded at the laying of the foundation of the temple (Ezra 3:10-11), Paul and Silas sang while imprisoned in the Philippian jail (Acts 16:25), the trumpet shall sound when Christ comes and Christians of every age are caught up together to be with Him in the air (Matthew 24:31), the seven trumpets played by the angels in the book of Revelation will announce great events in the last days (Revelation 8-11), the 24 elders will play upon their harps in heaven before the Throne of God (Revelation 5:8). Even one of the official feasts of the Jews was the Feast of Trumpets. And, Jesus Christ Himself sang a hymn with the disciples in the upper room (Matthew 26:30), and is said to sing in the midst of the church in Hebrews 2:12 (quoting Psalm 22:22).

The highest use of music is in the worship and praise of God

The commands to praise the Lord and worship him with instruments, and the many examples recorded are ubiquitous throughout the Scriptures. Praising the Lord through song is a daily and lifelong action of the believer in his private life and in worship. David writes in Psalm 146:1-2: “Praise ye the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul. While I live will I praise the LORD: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being.” Psalm 150 calls on all instruments and all voices — everything that hath breath — to praise the Lord! Psalm 30:4 tells us to “Sing unto the Lord, O ye saints of his, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.”

Continued on page 2

The words of the Psalms and other portions of Scripture have held a high position in the hymnody of the people of God throughout the history of the church. Certainly the words of Scripture, sung in proper context are the very Word of God, and can bear no improvement. In addition, many hymns have been written by devout Christians through the ages, and have been a blessing to the church. However, all Christians and church leaders must be scrupulous to examine the words of the songs and hymns chosen to make sure they are true to the Bible, and meet the proper purpose in the worship of God.

In the New Testament, Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16-17 are key passages. We see in these passages that when we worship God we are to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.” All believers are to join in singing “psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs” when we gather together in worship. However, it is not only the words that matter. Our singing is not just a ritual, but must come from pure hearts that love God, and it is to be directed to the Lord.

God despises singing and supposed worship if it is not truly coming from a heart obedient to God’s Word, and dedicated to His service. In Amos 5:23, God told the disobedient Children of Israel that He rejected their sacrifices. He further told them: “Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols.”

Motion in worship

The Old Testament speaks of dancing for joy in worship on several occasions. The New Testament is silent concerning this. Movement certainly is not bad in itself, and is employed by many faithful churches around the world. No matter what culture or practice we have, our guiding principle must always be what we read in Psalm 96:9: “O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth.” If movement is in any way sensual or lewd, or if it mimics actions seen in nightclubs, bars, and any other ungodly circumstance, it makes a mockery of true worship of God, and is in opposition to such passages as 2 Timothy 2:22: “Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” We also are commanded to “Love not the world, neither the things which are of the world ...” (1 John 2:15).

Also, “performances,” where attention is drawn to the musicians, rather than to Christ, must be guarded against. Sadly, what our young people see on television and social media, presenting itself as worship, is often just a production to keep people entertained — geared to making sure people continue to watch the show. The wide availability of keyboards, with sounds and rhythms of worldly styles of music, and distracting novel sounds, should come with some instruction about the purpose of worship to those who will be playing them. This applies also to the great availability of musical sound tracks often played over loudspeaking systems. Biblical wisdom, discretion and temperance should be used concerning the use of these modern technological aids.

Actions and practices which come from the worldly society around us, particularly that widely associated with the practices of the unregenerate, or modern emotional “worship” not rooted in Biblical faithfulness, must be rejected. We cannot preach solid Biblical truth, and use music and practices which contradict it. A pastor must use godly wisdom, gained from his diligent study of God’s Word and walk with the Lord, to lead his flock in these matters.

Music for Christian instruction

The Bible many times uses music for the instruction and warning of God’s people. When Moses lay upon his deathbed, God directed him to write a song, and teach it unto the Children of Israel: “Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel” (Deuteronomy 31:19). It was for their present instruction and to convict them in the years ahead.

In Psalm 107:22, we are told: “and declare his works with rejoicing [singing].” Such music refreshes and renews our knowledge of God’s glory, in all its aspects, and is frequently employed directly in our praise of God.

In the New Testament, Paul wrote to the Colossian church that they should be active in “teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16).

Music used for evil purposes

Any good thing that God has created can be perverted by Satan for evil purposes. Daniel 3:7 shows music involved in worshipping a false idol: “Therefore at that time, when all the people heard the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and all kinds of musick, all the people, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.” David lamented in Psalm 69:12: “They that sit in the gate speak against me; and I was the song of the drunkards.” Music was used for worship in pagan temples, and for various lewd and wicked purposes — much as it is today.

From church history we learn that during the Arian controversy in the fourth century AD, the Alexandrian deacon Athanasius wrote that this heresy spread so quickly across the Roman empire because Arius had put “his wretched words of irreligion into dissolute and loose metres.” People’s remembrance of the false teaching was magnified because it was wedded to music.

Is any kind of music acceptable in the worship of God and in the life of the believer?

Most will agree that the words to our songs are extremely important. However, some have taken the mistaken belief that the music itself is amoral — that what kind of music one chooses to use is perfectly fine at any time, and is completely detached from of any moral judgment or constraints. When rock and other worldly forms of music began to come into the western churches in the 1960s, there was much opposition in many quarters. The only argument that the advocates of this music could muster was to claim that music without words is “amoral.” However, this faulty assertion has been uniformly denied, with few exceptions, throughout history.

John Calvin wrote: “There is hardly anything in the world with more power to turn or bend, this way and that, the morals of men.... It has a secret power to move our hearts in one way or another. Wherefore we must be the more diligent in ruling it in such a manner that it may be useful to us and in no way pernicious.”

Martin Luther, in the preface to the Wittenberg Hymnal of 1524, wrote: “These songs ... give the young ... something to wean them away from love ballads and carnal songs and teach them something of value in their place.”

Puritan commentator Matthew Henry observes: “[Those who listen to musical instruments] should feel themselves obliged to preserve them always free from any thing that savours of immorality or profaneness.”

It is clear from Scripture that instruments used, and the melodies played, have great significance and elicit specific thoughts and emotions, apart from any lyrics. The trumpets of victory were certainly distinguished from the harps used in mourning.

There are many occasions where instrumental music by itself carried a message in the worship of God. In 1 Chronicles 25:1-3, Jeduthin and his sons played “with a harp, to give thanks and to praise the Lord.” Psalm 98:6 tells us: “With trumpets and sound of cornet make a joyful noise before the LORD, the King.”

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, he and Joshua heard a loud noise in the camp, which Moses discerned to be music. Joshua and Moses discussed the meaning found in the music, apart from the words (Exodus 32:17). They determined just from the sound that this music reflected evil purposes.

In 1 Samuel 16:23 we read that, when an evil spirit came upon King Saul, David played his harp before the King. The result was that: “Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.”

Paul tells us in the New Testament that a trumpet must be played in a way that evokes confidence and authority. He also indicates that even the timbre of the different instruments, and the characteristics of the music played, are quite important. In 1 Corinthians 14:7-8, he writes: “And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?”

Music of itself does carry meaning. For example, the tune for the hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” is strong and solid — like a “foundation,” like “a bulwark never failing.” Whereas, “Spirit of God, Descend Upon My Heart,” is a prayer, which is sung to music which reflects quietness, humility and spiritual introspection in a plea for God’s help. The tune for “Onward Christian Soldiers” is in a time signature which matches the common pattern of soldiers when

they are marching.

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

Conclusion

The International Council of Christian Churches, meeting in its 21st World Congress, June 21-28, 2023, in Collingswood, NJ, USA, calls on Bible believing Christians everywhere to:

1. examine the music they listen to in their daily lives in the light of all that the Bible teaches about godliness and holiness. 1 Peter 1:15: “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.”
2. only listen to music which will bring glory to God. Colossians 3:17: “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” One of the reasons many churches are using poor music, is because young people are not being taught at home what is good and wholesome. Rather, they are allowed to consume a steady diet of music which is carnal and sensual.
3. study music, in light of the Word of God, to be able to discern that which is worldly, trite, sentimental and mundane, from that which is excellent, and a worthy vehicle for conveying godly words.

The International Council of Christian Churches further calls on all Bible-believing churches to:

1. establish principles of music in worship which will lead the congregation in genuine praise to God.
2. choose styles of music which in any particular country or culture are not associated with sin, worldliness, and popular secular artists. Just as a faithful pastor does not compromise the preaching of the Word in order to attract an audience, neither should the motive for using any music be merely to attract the young people, or for other pragmatic reasons.
3. choose music which serves as the best vehicle possible for conveying the message of any given hymn or song. God has given Christians around the world a rich and diverse musical heritage. What might be best in one area of the world may not convey the same message in another place. However, all of these things must be taken into account, no matter what the musical norms may be in any given place.
4. make sure that all practices which accompany music in the church are godly, and will indeed bring praise to God. Worship should not place attention on the actions of man, but rather should be focused on the glory of God. Pastors and other church leaders should be involved in directing all aspects of corporate worship. Those involved with the music of the church should be marked by godliness. Musical decisions should not be left to the discretion of the carnal or spiritually immature.
5. train young people in the churches to sing the best hymns and Christian music at their disposal. The judgment concerning this may be quite different in various areas of the world. Like everything in life, it is usually best to dispose of the mediocre and inferior, in favor of that which is best. All music should be well crafted. It may be very simple, but must not be trite and superficial. It may be complex, but must not be pretentious or confusing. It should be beautiful, but not geared toward entertainment and carnal desires. It can include great variety, but it must always be appropriate and subservient to the message to be conveyed.

May all things be done to the glory of God alone. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

*“O sing unto the Lord a new song: sing unto the Lord, all the earth.
Sing unto the Lord, bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day to day.
Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people.”*