

## **MUSIC FOR THE CHRISTIAN?**

### **Let's Talk About Rock**

In the editorial "Heresy in Harmony," (Reformed Polemics, June 21/96) we mentioned the discussions in Reformed Perspective (Feb. - Sept./95) about "music for the Christian." The prolonged and passionate debates on this particular topic had their origin in the developments at our local high-school. Initially these debates were confined to the local scene, and carried out in the specific context of the music sung and performed at "school assemblies and morning devotions." However, with the publication in Reformed Perspective of the articles "Music for the Christian: Rock or Not!" (a) and "Hot Pink Refrigerators", (b) the debates moved into the direction of "let's talk about rock."

That these debates moved in that direction is understandable, for as long as there remain a number of simple-minded parents who are so naive as to forbid their children to listen to rock music it will be difficult to promote the introduction of this style of music into the school assemblies and morning devotions. If it can be proven, as Br. Selles suggests, that "we as Christians may listen to all types of music..." and "that we may allow our children to listen to 'Christian' rock (quotation marks mine, RD) even if we may not like it ourselves", (c) then what is all the fuss about? If it's true, as Br. Davis states that "it's all God's music...", and that "no music is the Devil's music", then how do parents dare to reject certain styles of music just because they don't like them? After all, "it's up to us to use what he (God RD) has given to glorify His holy name" (d)

How should we respond to the statements and assertions made by Brs. Selles and Davis and all those who share and endorse these rather dubious or questionable sentiments? In a response by way of a letter to the editor (March/96) it was suggested that "the Selles article on rock music should never have been published, nor the letters to the editor which promoted rock music... Please publish that which builds up, with the truth as our Lord gave it to us, and leave the other to secular publications." This response points the finger to the crux of the matter. We could discuss at length the pros and cons of whether Br. Selles' article should have been published, particularly in a magazine that claims to present a Reformed perspective. However, we can readily agree that the perceived need for such a discussion is itself already indicative of the fact that we no longer have a consensus on what constitutes "the truth as our Lord gave it to us."

We said that we "no longer" have a consensus, and that begs the question: What has changed? Has rock music changed? Perhaps it has, but certainly not for the better. Have we as parents and children changed in what we listen to? On the basis of the recent articles on the subject of "music for the Christian" there is no doubt that such is definitely the case. And there is no doubt that also that is not for the better. We used to agree on what constituted "music for the Christian", but we certainly don't anymore. And why is that? Because many of us have lost the ability to discriminate between music. Why do we no longer possess this ability? Because "we are already so involved in the world that we can no longer discern it."

This last quote is the words of G.J. Nijhof, a Dutch journalist and lecturer, who specializes in the area of popular music. In our response to the "don't knock rock" sentiments we will explore some more of what Nijhof has to say in the article "Pop Music." (e) We note first of all that the

author is not speaking exclusively about rock music, but about pop music in general. He writes that "revolutions come in different forms. Some are violent and can be easily recognized. Others are non-violent but can be discerned. There are also spiritual revolutions. Superficially they are not easily recognized.

All Great Revolutions have one thing in common, namely this: they do not recognize authority, be it of God or of men. The will and the power of the people stand central and society has to be altered accordingly. Therefore, power structures must be changed and man's thoughts as well. For people who wish to serve God according to His Word cannot be completely democratic and revolutionary. They are by nature anti-revolutionary. They do not fit the new order. That is why these people's thoughts must be changed... they pose a threat to the revolution.

Art must co-operate in the process, which means music as well. In this connection one speaks of 'involved' art, which means an art which is related to society, or art which lives among the people. For that reason pop music sometimes is typified as music of the masses, the democracy. John Sinclair wrote in "Music is Revolution": 'Rock is the most revolutionary force in the world...' The German author, Rolf Ulrich Kaiser, wrote the following: 'The popular song has, as it were, come of age. (1967/68, RD) The separation between the world of work and of entertainment has been wiped out. The modern song writers steadfastly and persistently practice politics! I cited Frank Zappa, who said 'We want to take over the leadership of this country from the older atrophied elements...'

These are only a few quotations which show that pop music is not just another form of amusement, of popular music. The statement that this phenomena completely fits the picture of revolution is closer to the truth. To put it even stronger, these authors call pop music revolutionary in character and intent. And thereby they, as revolutionary pace setters, confirm us, as anti-revolutionary, Reformed people, in our conviction that pop music only exists in a revolutionary atmosphere." (f)

Nijhof acknowledges that "for some these introductory remarks about pop music and revolution are rather shocking. Whoever heard something so crazy? It must be typically Reformed to argue this way. Others may perhaps say: There is something to it, but the point is quite exaggerated. You cannot lump everything together. There are different opinions among us. What's the fuss, it will come out all right in the end." Nijhof also recounts that it is his experience that, "if there is one subject about which everyone has an opinion, without knowing anything about it, it is pop music." The expressed opinions are not based on a good knowledge of the subject at hand, but determined by the fact that "they have a taste that can (must RD) be satisfied by this type of music."

Why did pop music become so popular? Nijhof writes that "the answer lies in 'pop' itself. Pop comes from 'popular' which in turn comes from the Latin 'populos' meaning people. It is the music for the people, for the masses." Nijhof makes a comparison with another phenomena, that "less suddenly, but nevertheless affects everything, and completely conquers the world, namely sport. He observes that "millions upon millions sit in front of the T.V., throughout the week and on Sunday in particular, watching sports in all its variety. Is it not so that in our society Christ becomes less and less important, and that bread and games, sports and amusement, become more and more important? Yes indeed, often so important that the youth of the church are also caught up in it.

J. Tuininga, expresses similar sentiments specifically about rock music. He says: "What disturbs me is that so many of our young people appear to be taken in by, or even hooked on, rock music. And so we have endless debates about the merits or demerits of such music. We even have what is called "Christian rock", and that is supposed to be edifying and perhaps even necessary in the lives of young people." (g) Quoting Nijhof again: "Sure we still go to church, we still attend catechism classes, but are we not also under the spell of food and entertainment, television and pop music? That is the seriousness of the situation. We are Reformed in our organization and our church activities, but our amusement, our rejoicing, we do not find in the Lord but in the amusement of this world. And it begins with the differences of opinion about all this in the church."

Is it therefore necessary and crucial that we respond to the statements and assertions made by Brs. Selles and Davis and all those who share and endorse these rather dubious or questionable sentiments? There is no need to repeat what was said by Peter Englefield in "Christian vs Rock" (h) and John Makujina in "Rock Music and the Question of Neutrality."(i) A year has passed since these excellent articles were written and published. We have as yet no response from Br. Selles to these Scriptural and scholarly articles in spite of allegations that he "did not honestly report... did not consider the possibility... offers no reasons..."

In a short letter to "Information" (Feb, 24/96) Br. Selles writes: "If I used Scripture incorrectly, then please respond to that..." We might ask: If Englefield and Makujina are so obviously wrong in their assertion that "rock music communicates values that are unsuitable for Christian synthesis" then perhaps Br. Selles could extend to us the same courtesy he expects from others, namely a "Scripturally based" response to the valid arguments presented. That is what Reformed polemics is all about. Why then no response?

Nijhof offers some possible reasons. "In my opinion, you can only judge a phenomenon well if you have sufficient knowledge... Everyone has an opinion without knowing anything about it... they have a taste that can (must RD) be satisfied by this type of music." Paraphrasing a quote we used previously he notes that "they still listen politely but they are already so involved in the world that they can no longer discern it."

Nijhof and Tuininga expressed their concerns in the context of pop and rock music and articulated the gullibility and naiveté of our "young people" in this regard. The local discussions about "music for the Christian" took place in the context of "the music sung and performed at school assemblies and morning devotions." The support or defense of rock music, "Christian" rock, Contemporary Christian Music, and so called Praise and Worship music manifested itself predominantly among those whom we have entrusted with the education of our "young people." That should give us reason for concern and impetus for response.

We do not question the academic qualifications and dedication of our teachers. We definitely do question their direction on the matter of "music for the Christian", and their apparent inability or unwillingness to deal with the real issues. In "The Polemics of Love", (j) Rev. Cl. Stam reminds us that to reject polemics is to refuse to fight for the unity of the true faith. "Those who love the Truth, will always seek to promote it and will not stand by (idly RD) to see it attacked and ridiculed." Do we still care?

Back to Nijhof! He mentions that the revolutionary thought in pop music is "not so much a matter of words but of music. The music itself possessed the power of revolution through its

dissoluteness and norm-less-ness..." We are told that "the music itself cannot be criticized, for music is a gift of God and one cannot quarrel about taste. What is forgotten in this argument is that there has been a fall into sin, that we of ourselves are incapable of doing any good, and that our artistic endeavors are under the influence of the fall into sin... We must learn to understand that God gave great gifts to man and that music is one of them... God gave us gifts so that we may honour Him with them, so that we would show our thankfulness to Him... When we speak about music then, we first of all speak about our worship of God and only later about entertainment music."

We can indeed quarrel about taste. "But has our taste been exempted from the fall into sin? Is everything we find beautiful, automatically to the honour of God, or are there norms for what must be considered beautiful? The trouble with this kind of discussion is the refusal to argue the matter on that basis. One's own taste is taken to be the norm. One sets one's own norm and does not wish to be convinced, if it means that one must revise one's taste." (k)

We have already established that the revolutionary element is present in the music itself. It is the Devil's music and "it has to do with rebellion; with all the emotions which man experiences since the fall. The revolutionary element is that sinful man now glorifies such emotions. It becomes his amusement. He translates his rebellion into amusement and his aggression idem ditto... It should be clear that we may not seek our refuge in this sort of music... In this music we must see the antithesis which in creation exists between the church and the world." (l)

When we no longer see that antithesis today, when we are already so involved in the world that we can no longer discern it, then the future looks grim for the next church generation. "We must distance ourselves from the amusement of this world and rejoice in the Lord at all times. That too is amusement: to rejoice in the lord. Let us be serious about our amusement, without striving for a cultural unity between church and world, which is the goal of the devil, the great revolutionary." (m) Ron Dykstra

- a)c) Music for the Christian: Rock or Not!", Bill Selles, Reformed Perspective, April&May/95.
- b)d) Hot Pink Refrigerators, Brad Davis, Reformed Perspective, April/94.
- e)f)k)l)m) Pop Music, G.J. Nijhof, Reformed Music Journal, January/90.
- g) Learning to Discriminate Between Music, J. Tuininga, Outlook, January/83
- h) Reformed Perspective, Sept./95
- i) Reformed Perspective, July&August/95.
- j) Reformed Perspective, June/89

## WHAT DOES THE LIBERATION MEAN FOR US TODAY

(Part two of a speech delivered by Rev. M. J. C. Blok in the Netherlands and translated from Reformanda)

It is remarkable to note the hesitancy of the consistory. The dogmatic and church political issues were "held-over" until the consistory itself could establish a position. The consistory was divided. Undoubtedly the war circumstances played a role in this. Many had "neither shoes nor any form of wheeled transportation". Heating in the church building was problematic. There was a shortage of paper. In several places in Apeldoorn people were being shot down. Typhoid and dysentery also appeared.

In February 1945 ( a half year after the reading of the Act of Liberation or Return on Aug.11, 1944 in the Lutheran Church in Den Hague) the consistory still had not determined a position regarding the issues. When, at last in May 1945 (the month of the liberation of our country), the members of the consistory receive a report from the local minister, Rev. Timmer, it completely follows the line of the synod. The uncertainty of many months changes into assuredness - assuredness in following the synod. It is not surprising that as a result the Act of Liberation or Return was signed in Apeldoorn on May 15, 1945.

One of the conclusions drawn from this story may be that in Apeldoorn things were not done too hastily.

Our talk has left aside the human emotions in this drama. But be assured that there was much distress on both sides: among the concerned as well as those who followed the direction of the synod.

### *Four Ministers*

The four ministers in Apeldoorn played an important role; even when they did not play a role and didn't want to express an opinion. Rev.Goris: he was really Kuyperian. Baptism is only real when there is the root of faith already in the child. Rev. Goris is characterized as a friendly minister.

Rev.de Bruyn: he was minister in West, and gifted preacher. He attracted full churches. But he was afraid in wartime.

Rev.Nawijn: he was an evangelistic preacher and did much in the resistance movement but did nothing against the synod.

Rev.Timmer: a striking minister. He worked in South; a covenantal preacher in the line of Holwerda. He was an enthralling preacher. He preached the covenant with its two sides. But when push came to shove Rev. Timmer backed off. He did not have the courage to join that group of 200 souls (the reformed Church at Apeldoorn consisted of some 5000 souls in those days!)

In May 1945 Rev. Timmer is in line with the synod.

How large would the Liberated group have been if Rev. Timmer had liberated himself? Of course we don't know that now. But certainly ministers do have a great responsibility. Even when they don't choose sides they have a large impact.

It is God Who made some people faithful, in the office of all believers and in the special

offices - three office bearers liberated themselves.

### *Just Reformed*

These liberated people wanted remain "just reformed", like they had been before 1942, before the synodical teachings and before the suspensions and deposing.

Rev.G.Janssen writes in *De Feitelijke Toedracht* (p.137) [The Actual Happenings]: the Liberation has certainly exposed the fracture in the life of the reformed churches, but it has not been a church break, but rather a church restoration.

### *Church restoration.*

Obedience to the Christ or the yoke of the synod, that was the choice. When the Liberation finally came, it was not a departure from the reformed churches, but a continuance of those churches. In the well-known Act of Liberation or Return (Aug.11, 1944) we read the expressed wish that the churches... 'may return to a unified existence in obedience to Christ and the Word of God, as is confessed in the forms of unity, previously accepted by these churches, and in this alone.' The Act points to the situation before 1942, before the synodical bindings. The Act points to the 'I do' spoken at the public profession of faith and at the installation into special office. It is an Act of Return. Return to the Word of the Lord!

We can only give a short impression of those times. There are a number of books that can be read about those times.

## *2. The Sixties*

While in the forties it was a matter of obedience to the Word of God and a return to the Three Forms of Unity, in the sixties it was a matter of remaining faithful to that Word, as it has been repeated in the confessions. One of the questions in the sixties was: Was the Liberation a work of the Lord or was it merely a disagreement among brothers or a fight between professors?

If I see it right, then in the sixties there was a strong call for tolerance, forbearance. Now there is Biblical tolerance and unbiblical tolerance. Biblical tolerance considers the possibility that in all honesty and due to lack of insight objections may arise against biblical teachings on sub-issues.

Then there is also a difference if one has such objections as a 'regular' congregation member or as a minister. A minister must lead the congregation in the true ways of the Lord and may not 'pervert' them (Acts 13:10). He must prepare straight pathways in rightly handling the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15). It also depends on the circumstances if, or to what extent, patience may be exercised. However, the congregation may not be led into confusion and no evil may be spoken of 'the way' of the Lord (Acts 19:9).

In the life of such a person to whom tolerance is shown there must be the willingness to listen to God's Word. There must be a willingness to be instructed and he may not promote his particular difficulties as doctrine in the congregation. For then the limit of such tolerance has been reached. For that limit can, after all, only be found in the Word of God and sound doctrine.

Such tolerance is not dependant on the approval of each and every member, but the church, as pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim.3:14) must determine it in obedience to the Word of

God. Biblical tolerance has profound respect for the Word of God.

Unbiblical tolerance is not based on the whole of Holy Scripture. We believe that a 'halt' should be placed on all false teachers. No promotion of false teaching may be given by book or magazine. Compare the Subscription Form for officebearers.

We will now first take a look at the situation before 1944:

In 1926 a new and ascending bible criticism had been rejected by the churches. The history of the fall into sin was being relativized by Dr. J. G. Geelkerken. But synod of Assen, 1926, said no, the tree in paradise was a real tree.

And after the Liberation, when in 1967, the 'immediate' (H.C., Lord's Day 22) salvation of deceased believers was denied (by Rev. B. Telder), the churches once again said no. This error will not be allowed in the churches.

When General Synod of Amersfoort-West (1967) rejected the teachings of Rev. Telder regarding soul-sleep, Rev. C. Vonk wrote, in *The Dead Know Nothing*:

"The oldest lie - namely that of Satan overagainst man in Paradise - has wrapped itself in its most recent church attire at Amersfoort." Believers, according to Vonk, were in danger of 'agreeing with the father of lies'. Well, in the Reformed churches there may be no room for promotion of such errors. That's why the synods said 'no' at that time.

[One more installment next time: the editors]