

Art and Affections: Correcting Categories

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My goal in this paper is to help believers apply the Bible to their musical choices in life and worship. My contention is, however, that believers today approach the issue of musical choices with certain errant foundational presuppositions that need to be corrected before they can rightly apply the Bible in this area. So my task in this paper is to address a few categories of thought that inform our approach when applying the Bible to music and suggest a few ways that we may need to correct our thinking.

Dissecting Emotion

The idea of “emotion” is one of those categories that I would argue has been altered today from the way biblical authors or original readers would have thought about it. Any thinker this side of the Enlightenment must account for the influences of Modernism and Postmodernism upon this subject if he is going to understand the Bible's discussions of Christian affection.

Not all emotion is created equal

In fact, the category of emotion itself is fairly novel. It is a category that was created near the dawn of the Enlightenment to describe the experience of humans as mere animals. Scruton rightly notes that, “If we look in the New Testament for a concept analogous to our modern concept of an emotion, we come up empty-handed.”¹ People look at certain language in the NT and interpret it through a post-Enlightenment understanding of emotion, which cannot be sustained historically or grammatically.

Premodern thought understood a distinction between kinds of emotion. At the time of the writing of the New Testament, common Greek thought articulated a distinction between the *splanchna* — the chest — and the *koilia* — the belly. The *splanchna* was the seat of the affections, things like love, joy, courage, and compassion. The *koilia* was the seat of the passions, things like appetite, sexuality, fear, and rage. The affections were to be nurtured, developed, and encouraged, and the passions were to be held under control. The passions were not evil — they were simply part of man's physical makeup, but in any contest between the passions and the intellect, the passions always won unless the intellect was supported by the affections.

This was the common way of articulating things in Greek culture, and therefore NT authors wrote with such distinctions in mind. For instance, Paul says in Philippians 3 that enemies of Christ worship their *koilia* — their “belly,” their passions. In Colossians 3 Paul tells Christians to put on *splanchna* — the “chest,” affections — of mercy, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, and longsuffering. In other words, this distinction is not explicitly defined in the New Testament because the original readers would have already understood it, but the distinction is clearly evident. Enemies of Christ serve their passions while God-pleasing Christians nurture noble affections.

1 Roger Scruton, *Modern Culture* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007), 8.

This distinction has been lost in our day, but it was maintained for thousands of years. In more recent times, Jonathan Edwards best articulated this distinction in *The Religious Affections*. Edwards defined affection as the “inclination of the will.” It is what moves us to do what we know is right. Edwards defined the affections as part of the mind, the immaterial part of man. On the other hand, he defined passion as the agent which immediately affected the “animal spirits,” the physical feelings and impulses we share with animals in terms of physical composition.

The affections and passions are frequently spoken of as the same, and yet in the more common use of speech, there is in some respect a difference. Affection is a word that in the ordinary signification, seems to be something more extensive than passion, being used for all vigorous lively actings of the will or inclination, but passion for those that are more sudden, and whose effects on the animal spirits are more violent, and the mind more over powered, and less in its own command.²

Both affections and passions can drive a person to action. The affections are the inclination of the will (the moral component of the spirit), while the passions drive physical impulses.

What is important to remember is that a Christian must never be governed by his passions. The Bible calls this part of man his “belly” — his “gut,” and reveals an unbeliever to be a slave to it (Philippians 3:19). A Christian should never allow his gut to control him. These passions and feelings are not evil; they are simply part of the physical makeup of mankind. To assign morality to them would be like assigning morality to hunger. Jesus Himself experienced the passion of anger, and yet without sin.

The physical passions are not evil in themselves, but they must always be kept under control. Left unchecked by the spirit, passions always lead to sin. This is why the Bible must warn, “Be angry, and yet do not sin” (Ephesians 4:26). Anger is not wrong, but it will lead to sin if not controlled. Likewise, appetite is a good thing, but left unchecked it results in gluttony. Sexuality is a wonderful gift from God, but uncontrolled it turns to lust. Fear is a necessary part of the survival instinct of man, but if it controls a person, he can not operate properly. You can distinguish between affections and passions because you can never have too much affection, but it is possible to have too much passion.

The problem is that when the passions are set in conflict with the mind, the passions will always win. A man may know that it is wrong to hit another man, but if he is angry, that knowledge alone will not stop him from reacting wrongly. It is only when his knowledge is supported by noble affections that he can overcome his passions. As C. S. Lewis says, “The head rules the belly through the chest.”³ This is true for faith. Faith is not mere belief in facts. That alone would not move a person to a righteous life. Faith is belief combined with the affection of trust. When belief is supported by trust, a person will be able to overcome his sinful urges. Christians, therefore, should strive to gain more right knowledge and nurture more right affections so that they act rightly. They must also beat their bodies and make them their slaves (1 Corinthians 9:27).

In summary, when people today talk about emotion, they are speaking of a category that may include the affections, passions, or the resultant feelings. This confusion is illustrated in the way Sam Storms interprets Edwards' *Religious Affections*:

Certainly there is what may rightly be called an emotional dimension to the affections. . . . [W]hereas affections are not less than emotions, they are surely more.⁴

2 Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2001), 26-27.

3 C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 24.

4 Sam Storms, *Signs of the Spirit* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007), 45.

This is why we must be more specific when discussing these things — “emotion” is just too broad a term. Most people are thinking of “feelings” when they say “emotion,” but not always. Joy, fear, and “butterflies” are all “emotions,” but they are very different from one another. Therefore, the emotional experiences created by various uses of art are consequently very different from one another.

Biblical Anthropology

Premodern thought, even non-Christian premodern thought, understood this distinction because it understood man to be a union of body and spirit. Secularism teaches that man is merely body, but the Bible teaches a holistic dualism where material and immaterial combine to compose man.⁵ Unlike Plato, who argued that the body is the inferior, undesirable “shell” of the true person, the Bible teaches that the physical body is a good, God-given part of human nature. In fact, believers will be given new, physical bodies after the resurrection. Even during the intermediate state, souls seem to have some kind of bodily form. In other words, human “persons” are complete only as a uniting of body and soul. Animals are only body; God is only spirit.⁶ But man was created out of the dust of the earth (material) and infused with the very breath of God (spirit). Thus man is a living soul.

The body and spirit constantly interact and influence one another. For instance, information that enters through the physical senses can then be processed by the immaterial mind. Or, something contemplated by the mind can result in physical feelings. Man is wonderfully designed by God as an interaction between the spirit and body.

Although the body and spirit do interact and affect one another as the totality of the human person, each part can be affected apart from the other. Just like animals operate completely on the basis of biological reactions to stimuli, so man can react on that basis alone. For example, if a child rounds the corner and his sibling shouts “Boo!” in order to scare him, the reaction the child has is purely physical — nothing had occurred in his spirit to cause him to jump. His brain gathered the data of a suddenly loud sound that produced certain feelings that created the impulse to jump.

This kind of purely physical, chemical process of causation is part of the biological nature of man. Appetite, fear, anger, sexual drive, sentimentality, and many other passions that produce feelings such as tears, increased heart rate, goosebumps, or exhilaration can be formed without thought by pure, physical stimuli. The physical response of laughing when tickled is an example of this purely physical causation. Adults, infants, and animals alike can experience this kind of response.

On the other hand, these kinds of physical reactions can also be created as a result of thought. This reveals the interaction between spirit and body. As the mind (a component of the spiritual nature) comprehends an insult, it produces the passion of anger accompanied by various feelings that move the person to action. Likewise, when a person laughs because he understands a joke, the same physical response occurs as when he is tickled, but it began in his mind, a component of spirit.

But just like the physical part of man can be affected apart from the spirit, so can the spirit operate apart from any influence upon the body. A man may have love for his wife because of his knowledge of her, but that love is not always accompanied by physical feelings. Love is an affection — something purely spiritual. It can, and often does, produce feelings, but it does not have to. Often those feelings are mistaken for the love itself, but if love were merely a feeling, then God would not be able to experience love, for He has no body.

⁵ See John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

⁶ Except, of course, in the person of Jesus Christ since His incarnation.

The affections are part of man's spiritual nature. They are products of thought and may or may not be accompanied by feelings. Furthermore, different people experience different levels of feeling as a result of possessing certain affections. Two people may both possess the affection of courage but may exhibit it through different physical feelings.⁷

This kind of distinction between spiritual affection and physical feeling must be maintained when discussing the nature of spiritual experience. A response of the affections — a spiritual inclination toward or away from an intellectual idea — may result in some kind of physical expression. It might be tears or exhilaration or goosebumps or increased heart rate. But that kind of connection varies widely from time to time or person to person, and therefore the physical feelings do not define the spiritual experience. One can experience the affection of love without anything happening physically to him. This is certain because God experiences affections, and he has no body. Or one can experience the affection of love and have a whole lot of physical things happen to him. That kind of spirit-body connection varies based on many factors, and what is important to note is that there is no consistent, universal connection between a certain spiritual experience and particular physical feelings or expressions. Two different people may both experience the spiritual affection of love, but it may affect them physically in completely different ways.

Furthermore, physical feelings can be artificially stimulated without any spiritual experience whatsoever. A person may experience a fast heart beat, goosebumps, and exhilaration as a result of the affection of joy, but those same physical feelings can be chemically stimulated by riding a roller coaster.

The essential point to recognize is that while physical feelings often accompany spiritual affections, those feelings do not define the spiritual experience. Unfortunately in our day, because such distinctions have been lost, spiritual experience is often defined by physical feelings or external expressions. Many Christians rightly insist that spiritual experience is essentially a component of the emotions, but because they recognize no distinction within the category of emotion, they define emotion by the physical experience. So they look at places where, for instance, the New Testament talks about things like love or joy, and they interpret it to necessarily involve chemical processes in the body. Yet when the NT authors discuss what we would call "emotion," they have in mind spiritual states rather than bodily states.

Jonathan Edwards faced this problem of confusing the spiritual with the physical during and after the Great Awakening. As people were truly, spiritually converted, many did experience intense physical responses, and those physical responses came to define the Awakening. This created two extremes in how Christians viewed what was happening. Some believers who saw the physical responses as the defining characteristic of the event sought to recreate such experiences using means to manipulate physical feelings. Others rejected the validity of the Awakening altogether because they saw what was happening as merely excesses of emotionalism. Edwards' reply was to emphasize the distinction between religious affections and physical response and define religion as consisting in the affections which may manifest themselves in external feelings.

⁷ Keep in mind that whenever we attempt to assign terms to things that happen internally, we will always be imprecise. The Bible itself uses the same terms to describe different parts of man, such as "heart" or "soul." It is very possible to disagree with the terms I chose to designate various affections, passions, or feelings. The important thing is to understand the basic concepts.

In his *Religious Affections*, Edwards sought to correct this kind of thinking by asserting what was not a sign of spirituality and explaining the defining characteristics of the religious affections. Among things Edwards argued were signs of “nothing” were the following:

- Intense or high affections
- Physical manifestations
- Excessive excitement and talkativeness
- The way in which affections are brought about
- Praising God

Instead, Edwards argued that true religious affections are characterized by the following:

- They are from a divine influence.
- Their object is the excellence of divine things.
- They are founded on the loveliness of the moral excellency of divine things.
- They arise from the mind's being enlightened, rightly and spiritually to understand or apprehend divine things.
- They are attended with a reasonable and spiritual conviction of the reality and certainty of divine things.
- They are attended with evangelical humiliation.
- They are attended with a change of nature.
- They are attended with the lamb-like, dove-like spirit and temper of Jesus Christ.
- They soften the heart and are attended and followed with a Christian tenderness of spirit.
- They have beautiful symmetry and proportion.

What is very interesting is that after the Awakening, Edwards noted that the more genuine conversions were those, not accompanied by intense physical externals, but those characterized by “greater solemnity, and greater humility and self-distrust, and greater engagedness after holy living and perseverance.”⁸ In other words, Edwards' conclusion was that true religious affections usually produced more subtle, modest physical responses rather than the intense emotionalism for which the Awakening is often known. And the only true evidence of affection is holy living. Murray notes that Edwards and other pastors during the Great Awakening actually sought to avoid the physical excitements that many people often associate with the Awakening today.⁹

Since that time equating physical feeling with spiritual experience became more and more common. Then historically, as thoughtful conservatives noticed the excesses of emotionalism within some circles of Christianity, they began to deny that emotion had any part in the life of faith. Yet it was not emotion *per se* that was problematic, it was lack of distinction between spiritual affections and physical feelings.

This distinction is especially important when discussing New Testament worship. Christ made clear in John 4 that worship is *spirit* and truth, that is, an inward, immaterial response to truth. The author of Hebrews argues at the end of chapter 12 that NT worship is not like OT worship with all its smells and sights and physical sensations. These Hebrew Christians were being tempted to return to

8 Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 1 (New York: Carvill, 1830), 169.

9 See Ian Murray, *Revival and Revivalism* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 137-138, 163-164.

Judaism partly because they missed the sensory elements of Jewish worship. But the author had explained back in chapter 10 that those physical aspects were merely shadows of spiritual realities that came to fruition with Christ, and now they are no longer necessary. He argues that in the NT church we have not come to Mt. Sinai with all its spectacular physical sense experiences, but we have come to the heavenly Jerusalem — we are now spiritually seated in heaven with Christ, and so we worship purely spiritually, not physically.

Affects of Music

I have argued that music is a metaphor of emotion, yet my explanation is clearly lacking now that we have made a necessary distinction within the category of emotion.

Dionysian vs. Apollonian

Premodern thought, understanding music to be metaphor of emotion, and understanding a distinction between the affections and passions, consequently understood a distinction between kinds of music. Some music inherently targets the spirit — the mind, the affections, and the will, while other music is designed simply to artificially create a physical experience of the senses. Augustine and the Reformers used the biblical terms “spiritual” and “carnal” to describe this distinction. Non-Christians have used the terms “classical” and “romantic,” and more recently Friederich Nietzsche used the labels “Apollonian” and “Dionysian.”

Both Dionysus and Apollo were mythological Greek gods associated with music. Apollo was the god of reason and logic and was considered the god of music since the Greeks thought of good music as a great expression of order and pattern (a la Pythagorus and Plato). Dionysus, on the other hand, was the god of wine and revelry and was worshiped with loud, raucous music accompanied by pipes and drums. Neitche used these names, then, to describe the distinction that had been made in the past between kinds of music.

In an article applying this distinction to sacred music, Daniel Reuning explains this distinction in kinds of music:

Music that communicates emotions with a Dionysian force is that kind which excites us to enjoy our emotions by being thoroughly involved or engrossed in them with our entire person. Our enjoyment of the emotion then becomes ego-directed, driven by the desire for self-gratification. This direction often shows itself in keen physical involvement; people become emotionally involved through stomping of the feet, swaying of the body, clapping of the hands, and waving of the arms. Music that solicits from us this kind of emotional response allows us to enjoy our emotions from the inside and very experientially. This kind of music is clearly anthropocentric in nature, because it turns man to himself, rather than away from himself, with the result that he becomes the appreciating center of his own emotions and experiences. Herein lies the goal of all entertainment and popular music, which must please or gratify the self if it is going to sell.¹⁰

He then cites Martin Luther as one who used such a distinction to determine what music was acceptable for sacred purposes:

10 Daniel Reuning, “Luther and Music,” *Concordia Theological Journal* 48:1 (January, 1984), 18.

Luther used the word “carnal” to describe this approach and produced his hymn books and choirbooks, so as to wean people away from it.

His music and that of the Lutheran heritage communicates a message with an Apollonian force, which allows our emotions to be enjoyed, while at the same time retaining control and mental freedom. We are relieved of the urgent requirements of our inner drives. Under Apollonian influence our emotions are viewed empathically or contemplatively in a more detached fashion, so that they might always be subject to our discretion and judgment. Since the major point of the Reformation, as of Scripture itself, was to turn man away from everything within himself as the source of hope and assurance of salvation — to the grace of God alone, earned for us by Christ Himself — it was logical for Lutherans to use Apollonian music. Man-directed Dionysian music would only confuse or contradict the message through its anthropocentric emotional forces. Just as hymns and spiritual songs with words full of Dionysian content, doting upon human experience and feelings, are incongruent with the biblical proclamation of the Gospel, so also is music that revels in Dionysian emotionalism. Thus, because music has so much influence on one’s understanding of the Gospel, Apollonian reinforcement was the obvious choice. Furthermore, this choice is just as relevant to us today, since the emotional forces in music keep on conveying their unique messages, remaining unaffected by changes in time or environment — a truly universal expression!¹¹

Another way of categorizing this distinction more along analytical lines was espoused by music theorist Heinrich Schenker (1868-1935). Schenker argued that every element of a composition should have purpose and unity with the underlying compositional structure. Music that had other elements not tied to the structure was dishonest and manipulative. For instance, he argued that the music of Wagner was manipulative because Wagner included many elements in his compositions merely for the spectacle and their stimulative effect on the listener.¹²

I often use the terms “modest” and “immodest” to describe these two categories. Modest music does not draw the attention to itself. Modest music is composed, like Schenker argued, with structural unity. It is intended to express a noble affection or series of affections that communicate to the spirit of man. Immodest music contains musical elements that draw attention to themselves merely for the sake of spectacle or manipulation. This music directly targets the physical feelings of man in order to immediately gratify.

The difference between Apollonian and Dionysian music is basically what it targets in man. Apollonian music targets the spirit of man — the mind, the affections, and the will. Once the spirit is moved by such music, it may often result in some kind of physical sensation, but that is not the target; it is a result. Dionysian music targets the passions of man — the physical feelings themselves for their own sake. It artificially stimulates such feelings.

Now I will not go as far as to say that all artificial stimulation is always wrong. But a correct understanding of artificial stimulants will cause us to be guarded about their use, and we should certainly avoid them as an attempt to create a spiritual experience. Note the words of J. C. Ryle:

11 Ibid., 18-19.

12 See Nicholas Cook, “Schenker’s Theory of Music as Ethics,” *The Journal of Musicology*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Autumn, 1989), pp. 415-439.

Another mark of growth in grace is increased spirituality of taste and mind. The man whose soul is growing takes more interest in spiritual things every year. He does not neglect his duty in the world. He discharges faithfully, diligently and conscientiously every relation of life, whether at home or abroad. But the things he loves best are spiritual things. The ways and fashions and amusements and recreations of the world have a continually decreasing place in his heart. He does not condemn them as downright sinful, nor say that those who have anything to do with them are going to hell. He only feels that they have a constantly diminishing hold on his own affections, and gradually seem smaller and more trifling in his eyes. Spiritual companions, spiritual occupations, spiritual conversation appear of ever-increasing value to him. Would anyone know if he is growing in grace? Then let him look within for increasing spirituality of taste.¹³

There are many ways to artificially stimulate happy feelings that have nothing to do with the spirit. Most entertainment, or at least amusement, is Dionysian. Roller coasters, fire works, dramatic arts, and music designed to amuse all target primarily the visceral parts of man to create an immediate, enjoyable feeling. I would argue that this kind of stimulation is not necessarily always wrong, but it must never be sought as a replacement for true spiritual affections.

Peter Masters argues this in his book, *Worship in the Melting Pot*. He calls this artificial stimulation in worship “ecstatic worship.”

Ecstatic worship is completely different [than true, biblical worship]. This aims at stirring the emotions to produce a simulated, exalted emotional state. Ecstatic worship takes place when the object of the exercise is to achieve a warm, happy feeling, perhaps great excitement, and even a sense of God presence *through the earthly, physical aspects of worship* such as music and movement. Among charismatics this is eagerly pursued, the programme [sic] being carefully engineered to bring worshippers to a high emotional pitch, and often to a mildly hypnotic state. In non-charismatic circles the objective is a little more modest, but essentially the same — to make an emotional impact. Worship leaders want to bypass rationality and get the feelings going by other means. They want to stir up “sensations” in order to produce euphoria.¹⁴

There are many things that people use to create artificially stimulated feelings that are meant to be a replacement for true spiritual affection, which takes much more work to develop. Alcohol is one of them. People every day try to drown away their miseries, and for a short time, they’re pretty happy. But when the artificial stimulant goes away, so does the feeling. Drugs are the same kind of thing. Pop music does the same thing. A driving rhythm or a sentimental tune can make you feel pretty good for a while, but not too long after the music stops, the feeling goes away. These are all Dionysian.

The problem with these kinds of artificial stimulants is not just that they are artificial, but that because they inherently lack depth or substance and are addictive, they leave a person needing more extreme forms to get the same feeling. So one glass or one sniff or some soft rock may create a buzz for

13 J. C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (Cambridge: J. Clarke, 1952), 89.

14 Peter Masters, *Worship in the Melting Pot* (Wakeman Trust, 2002), 23-24. Emphasis Original

a while, but pretty soon more doses are needed to create the same feeling.

The nature of Pop

People are drawn to Dionysian art because it creates enjoyable physical feelings that are immediate. No work or effort is required to enjoy the feeling. No mental or spiritual engagement is necessary. It is immediate because it is shallow; it has no depth. However, because of the inherent shallowness of the medium, greater doses are needed to create the same effects as a person becomes more desensitized. Therefore, Dionysian art is intrinsically addictive.

With the creation of mass media as a result of the Industrial Revolution, savvy businessmen soon saw the potential of taking advantage of the power of Dionysian music in order to make money. Certain music, for instance, because it created immediate results and was intrinsically addictive, provided the perfect medium for making a considerable amount of money. They found that it was not difficult to hook the masses on Dionysian forms of music. Then, when the masses inevitably desensitized themselves to the immediate affects of such music, the entrepreneurs were always ready with more novelty and more stimulating forms. Such was the birth of pop music.

Kenneth Myers, in his insightful book, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes*, provides a very helpful description of the nature of pop music, including a table that compares pop culture to traditional folk or high culture. In essence, this chart compares Dionysian and Appollonian forms of art:

Table 1:
Myers' Comparison of Popular Culture with Traditional/High Culture¹⁵

| Popular Culture | Traditional and High Culture |
|---|---|
| Focuses on the new | Focuses on the timeless |
| Discourages reflection | Encourages reflections |
| Pursued casually to “kill time” | Pursued with deliberation |
| Gives us what we want, tells us what we already know | Offers us what we could not have imagined |
| Relies on instant accessibility; encourages impatience | Requires training; encourages patience |
| Emphasizes information and trivia | Emphasizes knowledge and wisdom |
| Encourages quantitative concerns | Encourages qualitative concerns |
| Celebrates fame | Celebrates ability |
| Appeals to sentimentality | Appeals to appropriate, proportioned emotions |
| Context and form governed by requirements of the market | Content and form governed by requirements of created order |
| Formulas are the substance | Formulas are the tools |
| Relies on spectacle, tending to violence and prurience | Relies on formal dynamics and the power of symbols (including language) |
| Aesthetic power in reminding of something else | Aesthetic power in intrinsic attributes |
| Individualistic | Communal |
| Leaves us where it found us | Transforms sensibilities |
| Incapable of deep or sustained attention | Capable of repeated, careful attention |
| Lacks ambiguity | Allusive, suggests the transcendent |
| No discontinuity between life and art | Relies on “Secondary World” conventions |
| Reflects the desires of the self | Encourages understanding of others |
| Tends toward relativism | Tends toward submission to standards |
| Used | Received |

Conservatives have done themselves a disservice by defining pop music as sex. Certainly some pop music does express sexual passion, but pop music is a broader category encompassing all Dionysian music. Conservatives often describe pop music by certain musical elements such as back

15 Kenneth Myers, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1989), 120.

beat, vocal sliding, and breathy singing technique. Certainly music characterized by such elements is most likely Dionysian, but there is a whole lot more music that is Dionysian that does not have those elements. This reductionistic description of pop music by many conservatives, I believe, has led to a rejection of some forms of newer pop music that possess such elements while at the same time grasping onto other forms of pop music that don't express sexual passion, but nevertheless are emotionally manipulative in other ways.

Music and Emotion in the Church

A Radical Change

Protestants have historically been suspect of Dionysian forms of music, especially in sacred contexts, because they recognized that spiritual life resides in the affections and not in the physical feelings. They did not want to stimulate artificial experiences of the senses but rather nurture biblical affections through the mind and spirit. Presbyterians, Puritans, and Baptists especially warned of such dangers, which led them to formulate the Regulative Principle of Worship in order to keep extra-biblical Dionysian elements like icons and drama out of congregational worship.

Charles Finney was one of the first to significantly promote using Dionysian forms of music in the Church. Because Finney believed that conversion could be produced by human means,¹⁶ he sought to create certain experiences in his services that would lead people to accept the claims of Christianity. In his *Revival Lectures*, Finney insisted that “there must be excitement sufficient to wake up the dormant moral powers.”¹⁷ Ian Murray explains the connection between Finney's theology of conversion and the means he employed:

If conversion was the result of the sinner's decision, and if the inducing of that decision was the responsibility of a preacher, assisted by the Holy Spirit, then any measure that would bring the unconverted 'right up to the point of instant and absolute submission' had to be good.¹⁸

Finney found pop music as the perfect tool for creating such experiences because it was immediate, it stimulated excitement, and people naturally interpret such feelings as spiritual. Finney urged those writing and leading music in his meetings to look to the advertisers of the day for inspiration.

Those earliest forms of pop music may seem innocuous to contemporary ears, but that philosophy began a trend to use pop music to create emotional experiences in the Church that continues to this day. Later Revivalists followed Finney's lead¹⁹ and progressively adopted the newest, most exciting forms of pop music in their services in order to create sensual experiences. One popular early Revivalist song leader taught that “Creating the proper atmosphere for the character of the meeting to

16 “A revival is not a miracle, nor dependent on a miracle, in any sense. It is a purely philosophical result of the right use of the constituted means—as much so as any other effect produced by the application of means” (*Revivals of Religion* [CBN University Press, 1978], 4).

17 Charles Finney, *Revival Lectures*, (reprint, Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, n.d.), 4.

18 Murray, *Revival*, 246.

19 Murray notes, “That Charles G. Finney took a considerable part in the great change which was occurring in protestant America in the 1820s and 1830s, is indisputable” (*Revival*, 255).

be held is an important office of the director.”²⁰ He taught song leaders how using certain songs and directing methods could create the right “emotional conditioning.”²¹

Thus the contemporary philosophy of worship and music really finds its roots in Revivalism. Godfrey observes,

If we step back a minute and really look at the character of contemporary music, what we will find is that it is just a new stage in the evolution of revivalist hymnody. Revivalist hymnody, that came to be more and more prevalent in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, was music that was more upbeat, more lively, and more enthusiastic. It also often had a declining level of theological content in the texts of the hymns.²²

This method created a source for making money, too. Following the lead of secular markets, Christians began forming publishing houses in order to produce more sacred music that would appeal to the greatest number of people and keep them coming back for more.

At certain points along the way various groups believed that lines were being crossed with the newer music. Especially with Jazz and Rock, some groups refused to follow the trend. However, these groups continued using the outdated Dionysian music to which the current culture was now desensitized, leaving them using music that was neither relevant nor truly spiritual. They began to defend such music as the standard of conservatism and grasped the music out of nostalgia and reaction against worse forms, not because it truly nurtured Christian affections. This is where many fundamentalists find themselves. They rightfully reject modern, more overtly offensive forms of pop music, but some fundamentalists fail to recognize that the music they defend is no different in kind; it is only different by degree. The underlying characteristics of their sentimental music is no different than sexual music. In both cases the aim is the creation of a sensual experience.

With the Charismatic Movement came the first theological defense of Dionysian music in the Church. Since they are continuationists, they believe that external, physical signs accompany true, spiritual experiences. Charismatics inexorably link physical feelings and responses with spirituality. As John MacArthur notes, since charismatics believe that baptism of the Spirit is an experiential event occurring after conversion, they believe that

those who get this baptism also experience various phenomena, such as speaking in tongues, feelings of euphoria, visions, and emotional outbursts of various kinds. Those who have not experienced the baptism and its accompanying phenomena are not considered Spirit-filled; that is, they are immature, carnal, disobedient, and otherwise incomplete Christians.²³

If affection is defined as physical feeling, then it is only natural to use means to create such experiences in worship. As Godfrey notes,

20 Homer Rodeheaver and Charles B. Ford, Jr., *Song Leadership* (Winona Lake, IN: Rodeheaver, 1941), 8.

21 *Ibid.*, 30.

22 W. Robert Godfrey, “The Psalms and Contemporary Worship” in *The Worship of God* (Taylors, SC: Mentor, 2005), 104.

23 John MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1993), 29-30.

If there is a somewhat dramatic shift that took place in music leading to contemporary Christian music, that shift probably took place with the rise of Pentecostalism. The Pentecostal movement in its drive for religious experience and religious energy and religious excitement did indeed think in new ways about music and sought to take the revivalist tradition of hymnody and make it even more exciting, even more engaging.²⁴

Now pop music in church had a cross-denominational, theological defense, and the Praise and Worship movement was born. Precedent for using pop music in the Church had been set long before with Revivalism, but with charismatic theology came a defense based less in Pelagian pragmatism and more in worship theology.

The Church Today

Today, the influences of Modernism, Revivalism, and Charismaticism in the Church's understanding of the purpose and function of music in worship cannot be overestimated. First, because of Modernism, most Christians fail to understand the nature of emotion in human spirituality and worship. Most Christians see no fundamental distinction between a response of the affections and physical feelings. They group these two separate concepts under the umbrella of "emotion" and either reject it or embrace it all as worship.

This lack of fundamental distinction allows for Revivalism and Charismaticism to define the function of music in a corporate gathering as a medium for creating physical experiences they interpret to be spiritual. They may even use words like "affection" to describe the experience, but they clearly understand "affection" to be inexorably tied to physical response.

For example, in an interview with Tim Smith of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Bob Kauflin of Sovereign Grace Ministries insisted that a mature Christian will have some kind of physical response if he is truly responding with his affections. If he is not responding physically, Kauflin argued, he is probably not "engaged" in worship.²⁵ This is really not surprising since Kauflin is a continuationist, whom MacArthur argued link spiritual maturity with external, physical signs. Thankfully, Kauflin does insist that physical response does not prove true spirituality,²⁶ but he nevertheless insisted that someone who is spiritually "engaged" will exert certain physical responses. He compares the kind of response we need in worship to watching a movie or sports event. The problem is that what is going on in those contexts is fundamentally different than what is supposed to be happening in worship. There is nothing spiritual about the reactions to a movie or sports event. Those media are intrinsically Dionysian. Kauflin's argument represents the predominant thought amongst most Christians today — even cessationists. But this way of thinking runs contrary to how Edwards and most Protestant Christians prior to the Enlightenment understood spirituality in the Bible.

This lack of distinction is not limited to Charismatics or Revivalists because most churches have been at least somewhat influenced by the two movements to some degree, and all churches have been influenced by a modernistic understanding of anthropology and spirituality. Godfrey rightly notes that "what originated as a natural expression of the life, theology, and piety of the Pentecostal

24 Godfrey, "Psalms," 104.

25 http://theresurgence.com/tim-smith_2008-02-26_video_interview_with_bob_kaufin.

26 See Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 171.

movement in the 1920s has become generalized far beyond Pentecostal circles.”²⁷ What Chapell describes as charismatic worship could just as easily describe many non-charismatic churches today:

The more likely mindset is that worship leaders will select and sequence music that will wake people up, then get them fired up, then settle them down for the Sermon, and send them home afterward feeling good. Perhaps this is a crass way of explaining it, but such an approach is instinctive and understandable if one has little sense for the history and purposes of the church's worship.²⁸

Most believers today, I think, equate spiritual experience with some kind of feeling. This takes all kinds of shapes, of course, depending on the particular movement. Some define spiritual experience by "holy laughter" and "slaying in the Spirit." Others define it by mystical trance. Others as exciting, "slap-happy" energy. But most people define spiritual experience by some kind of intense "enthusiasm" or "zeal" or "passion" for God. Dabney offers a sober warning that believers should heed in this regard:

Millions of souls are in hell because they were unable to distinguish the elevation of animal feelings from general, genuine religious affections.²⁹

One key factor in the inability to distinguish the two is the music chosen for worship in churches today.

Conclusion

If the Church today is going to be able to rightly apply biblical principles to music and worship, it must recover important categories that are either assumed and implied or explicitly taught by biblical authors.

- Spiritual response of the affections is fundamentally distinct from and may exist apart from physical feeling.
- Dionysian forms of art target the physical feelings through emotional manipulation, while Apollonian forms communicate true spiritual affection.
- The conclusion, then, for someone wanting to rightly express and teach pure, religious affections in worship should be the following:
- Refuse to define spiritual experience in terms of physical response.
- Strive to discern between music that modestly supports biblical truth with noble Christian affections and music that artificially stimulates physical feelings, and reject the manipulative music.
- Encourage true spiritual worship through the use of simple, rich hymns with strong texts and modest music.

27 Godfrey, "Psalms," 105.

28 Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 70.

29 R. L. Dabney, "A Review of Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church," *The Presbyterian Quarterly* 3 (July 1889): 462-69.