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Contemporary Christian Music: An Evaluation

Klemet Preus

Johnny, a sixteen-year old high schooler, has just brought home the latest record by Iron Maiden. On the cover is a ghastly, hellish figure leering and drooling, apparently over the prospects of bringing Johnny home for a visit. The song titles leave little to be imagined. They speak of violence, sadistic perversion, satanism, and irrepressible sex. The names of Johnny's other musical artists are also alarming: Black Sabbath, Motley Crue, Judas Priest, Blue Oyster Cult, Cheap Trick, AC-DC, and KISS, which you have been told stands for Kids in Satan's Service. Their songs offer screaming, driving music which advocates just about everything Johnny ought to avoid, from homosexual perversion to satanic sacrifice, from suicide to dabbling in drugs.

Then, providentially it seems, one stumbles upon a flier promoting a dance for high school students at the church. Contemporary Christian musicians will be featured with cuts from Amy Grant, RezBand, Stryper, Keith Green, and more. Subsequently one discovers that an entire genre of music is available to Johnny at the local Christian bookstore. Johnny can have a heavy metal sound, a break-dance beat, a mellow folk sound, Country-Western, Rhythm and Blues, an Elvis 'fifties sound, or basically anything he wants without the ungodly lyrics. Church, district, and congregational newsletters offer critiques of the latest releases. In most metropolitan areas Johnny can find an FM station which plays contemporary Christian music all day long. This music claims to offer a viable and valuable substitute for those young people of America who want to encounter "God, the Rock that makes me roll."¹

I. The Theology of Contemporary Christian Music

As an apparent alternative, contemporary Christian music seems a god-send. It speaks of commitment to God and others, of love, of faith, and many other Christian virtues. And despite its varied artists it has a fairly consistent theological theme and a coherence which contrasts markedly with the inchoate machinations of other contemporary rock music. Because of its increasing appeal, its use in our church, and its claims to Gospel truth, contemporary Christian music is worthy of our understanding and evaluation. Like many notable expressions of Protestantism, the predominant message of contemporary Christian music can be expressed under five points.

A. *The Predicament of Humanity*

Contemporary Christian music in most of its forms either explicitly states or presupposes a troubled world. People are lost, confused, uncertain, and unhappy. The world is quickly closing in, suicide is becoming an attractive alternative, apathy reigns. Relationships are fractured, marriages broken, and no hope for love is immediately apparent. The Resurrection Band, for example, in its album, *Mommy Don't Love Daddy Anymore*, besides the title cut has songs entitled, "Alienated," "Stark-Spare," "The Chair," "First Degree Apathy," and "Can't Do It on My Own." Degarmo and Key, a very talented Grammy-nominated duo, complain:

Apathy alert.
 I hear a voice inside shouting to my heart,
 Apathy alert.
 It's time to do what's right,
 It's time for me to do my part—
 Broken dreams and breaking hearts
 Every place you look, but who can change it?
 What can I do all by myself?
 I'm not a King and I'm no Prophet.²

So also Silverwind, a trio of one man and two women, who sound remarkably similar to ABBA, describes the human predicament:

Do the days seem to drag on, has love become an old song,
 Cries and sorrows fill your night?
 All alone, no one caring,
 Tired of living and scared of sharing?
 Fear rules inside of your soul?
 And you feel like dying, but someone is crying,
 Give him your heart child, He'll lead you home.
 Give him your heart child, He'll lead you home.
 Family's divided, yours is just surviving,
 Mealtime conversation seems a chore.
 There's been cheating, there's been lying,
 Living ain't worth trying,
 You're telling me there's nowhere you belong.³

AD, another popular group, which features Kenny Livgren and Dave Hope, both formerly of the popular group "Kansas," can characterize the world's progress as moving backward and downward until "we defile and we desecrate, we destroy and we annihilate, we entangle and complicate," all because "separation from our Creator brought decay."⁴ Sin is pictured as a force which prevents

full happiness and causes the grief of this world. Sin is the inability to “make it on my own,” or it is the slavery to harmful habits such as sex⁵ or drugs.⁶

B. *Jesus*

Jesus offers the solution to the world’s problem. According to contemporary Christian music, He offers help to overcome the troubles and afflictions of humanity. He is the promised Messiah, true God Himself, who came to the world to save us. He does this by coming into our lives with His power. He enables us to do what sin made us unable to do. Jesus “will lead you home.”⁷ He is the “love” who finds a way out of sin and enables us to change and squelch any sinful and spiteful habits we might have.⁸ Because of Jesus “we don’t need no drugs to help push on; we’ve got His power in our souls.”⁹ Jesus loved us so much that, to prove His love, He was crucified. His sacrifice, while not necessarily an event with inherent blessings, is a proof of God’s strength and providential care in our lives. For example, Amy Grant, the queen of contemporary Christian music, sings:

If our God, His Son not sparing,
Came to rescue you,
Is there any circumstance
That He can’t see you through?¹⁰

Degarmo and Key employ the cross in the same way,

When I think back to the cross ...
And the man who gave his life,
I want to live for more than things that rust or die.
I don’t want to struggle for those things that pass away.
I want to live my life for the things that never fade.¹¹

Thus, the primary purpose of Christ and His cross is to provide either the assurance of God’s care or a powerful motive for our own sacrificial Christian living.

C. *Coming to Faith*

The help and encouragement of Jesus, according to contemporary Christian music, is futile if we fail to do our part by inviting Him into our lives or making a decision for Him. The decision doctrine is the central theological theme of contemporary Christian music and the article of faith which gives the whole system meaning. Consequently, contemporary Christian music has developed many ways in which to encourage troubled people to get Jesus into their lives.

Often an artist will encourage the sinners to perform their part in salvation, since Jesus can be trusted to perform His part. David Meese, with an Elton John sound, croons,

Time, time is runnin' out
 And your life, yes, your life is still in doubt.
 Well, it's all up to you,
 Everything you say and do.
 Will you face the truth
 Or be lost in certain doom?¹²

One of contemporary Christian music's wildest groups, RezBand, echoes the same idea:

The news is spreading all over town;
 You tore all of my roadblocks down.
 I can hardly eat, I can hardly sleep.
 I'm over my head in a love so deep.
 I heard what you said, you told me what could be,
 And then you left it up to me.
 But once I realized it was true,
 Jesus, I belong to you.¹³

More common is the practice of mentioning the cross with a hastily added condition that the hearer has to choose before the promised power of the cross can be effective. For example, Petra, perhaps the most prolific of contemporary Christian musical artists, sings:

They nailed his hands and his feet to the wood.
 At the foot of his cross all his enemies stood.
 He said "Father forgive them"—
 He gave them all he could give.
 Then he gave up his life and they watched him die.
 They laid his body in a rich man's tomb,
 But he rose from the dead and he's coming back soon.
 You can choose to believe it,
 You can choose to receive it,
 You can choose to believe that he died over you.¹⁴

Amy Grant maintains the same theme:

Listen, there's no need to waiver;
 Long ago a Savior died for you so ...
 Tell me, does the fear of losing
 Keep your heart from choosing who has hold of you?¹⁵

Others refer to the altar call as the place in which the decision for Jesus was made. Carmen, an Elvis Presley sound-alike, sings:

A preacher man in a three-piece suit,
Two-tone shoes and a tie to boot,
He said, "God sent His only Son
To save us from the evil one."

If you're not born again don't stall,
Come down when I give the altar call.
Well, I felt my feet shuffle down the aisle
While sinners marched down single file.

Then someone drove me to my knees
Like a divine electricity.
I said with my hands held high,
I began to cry and I said these words out loud,
I'm saved. Born all over again.¹⁶

Keith Green, the leading contemporary Christian music male vocalist until his untimely death in 1980, explains the conditional nature of forgiveness in his recorded "Altar call": "The Gospel is simply this, Jesus will forgive all your sins if you'll come to Him humbly, lay down at His feet and say, 'You're the Lord and I'll follow You the rest of my life on earth so that I can have the rest of eternity with You and the glory of Your Father.'"¹⁷

Most artists are content to require a decision, a giving, a yielding, a surrender, a reaching, or some other action in which God and the sinner cooperate in the conversion. The Darrell Mansfield Band, a rip-roaring rock and roll group reminiscent of Creedence Clearwater Revival, shouts:

Everybody's a Prophet, they tell you they know the way,
But once they've picked your pocket, they got nothing to say.
They say I'm narrow minded when it comes to being lost,
The path is wide to destruction, so I count the cost.
You gotta make a decision some day;
Don't let nobody stand in your way.
I see you pointing your finger at the faith I possess.
Well, my God's alive, you know, He passed the test.¹⁸

Stryper, the celebrated heavy metal group equipped in skin-tight clothes, make-up, studs, spikes, and sundry other weapons, wails:

I was looking for the answer all the time,
Always looking, never finding.
I was empty inside,
Falling into darkness,
Needing the light to see,
Reaching out for shelter.
He set me free.

I reached out, you reach out, He'll reach out today.
 I reached out, you reach out, He'll reach out today.¹⁹
 You can have it all tonight.
 Pick it up and make it right.
 Oh, you can be free;
 In the dark you need a light.
 Do you want to make it right?
 Oh, Jesus is the lover of your soul
 And he wants to give you all you need.
 So freely surrender;
 Open up unto his majesty.²⁰

White Heart, another heavy group, pictures faith as the first step in the salvation process:

But in your heart you know;
 Still you won't give it up, let it go.
 Your life's a hollow lie
 It's time for you to realize.
 You gotta be a believer.
 Step one, be a believer.
 You gotta look to the Savior
 To find that only answer.
 You gotta be a believer,
 That's when you'll discover
 The love you're missing.
 You know that there's no other way.
 You gotta be a believer.²¹

And if break-dance is needed, the Rap'sures can move your feet with the lyrics:

Nicodemus thought he was a righteous man,
 But in the eyes of God he could not stand.
 When it comes to salvation we're all the same.
 To be saved from sin we must be born again.
 Yah Jesus is coming and it's gonna be soon,
 For one more sinner there's always room.
 So give him your heart; he will see you thru,
 From birth number one to birth number two.
 You must be born again.
 Jesus said, "You must be born again."²²

In contemporary Christian music conversion is viewed both as something the sinner must accomplish on his own and as something the sinner does to fulfill a condition placed on the forgiveness of

sins. In his *Songs from the Shepherd* Keith Green sings a song called "The Promise Song." On the album jacket the lyrics are printed. He introduces them with the assertion that God never gives promises unconditionally but always attaches a condition to His promise. The song demonstrates his point:

And if you'll do my will, I'll make you living stones
To build up in my Father's house, if you'll serve me alone.

And if you'll love all men, especially the least,
I'll raise you up the lowest one, and make you kings and priests.

And if you'll seek my face, and set your life apart,
I'll let myself be found by you, when you look with all your heart.

And if you never turn aside, to the left or to the right,
I'll be a lamp unto your feet and keep you on the paths of light.²³

Since, in contemporary Christian music, the Gospel's effectiveness depends on the hearer's response, the inherent power of the Gospel is rarely, if ever, mentioned. The sacraments are mentioned either not at all or disparagingly as things on which we cannot rely.²⁴ Instead we must "do," "serve," "love," "seek," "look," and "never turn aside" before the promise of God can be ours.

D. *The Nature of Faith*

Faith, according to contemporary Christian music, is valued for its emotional aspects or by the emotions it induces. These emotions, in turn, are viewed as the true sign of Christian commitment or faith. Carmen sings a song entitled "Som-O-Dat," which tells of a man who has "some-o-dat." In the song various other people want "some-o-dat" but are unwilling to humble themselves or pray or fulfill other prerequisites. Carmen concludes:

Well you can't find it in a bottle
Or even when you pop a pill or two.
You can't find it smoking dope that's free,
'Cause one fine day you're gonna see
That the dope that's being smoked, my friend, is you.

Well, if you're depressed, then get used to it,
Because without Jesus you have blew it.
He's the only one who can give you som-o-dat.
Why not try the Lord for goodness sake?
You'll be happy as a dog with a T-bone steak.
Then you can say, "Hey, I got som-o-dat."²⁵

The impression is given that Jesus will do for you what the bottle, pills, or dope once did. Keith Green is more explicit:

You know I can't explain to you how He really does it. But He proved Himself to me in such a holy way, such a complete way that I'd die for that faith, that I'd die for that belief because it's more than a belief. He lives in my heart and that's the only proof, it's the only proof that I can give you 'cause He lives in my heart. Those people that knew me before didn't know that I could believe something so strong.²⁶

AD also makes faith a heart-felt feeling:

From the clamor and confusion we live in
 There lies a refuge from the threatening time,
 A cool oasis in the heat of the desert,
 A resurrection from this graveyard of pride.
 If you tell me it's just imagination,
 I won't believe it,
 'Cause my heart tells me this is for real,
 The reveille and fascination.
 When destiny draws near — the future holds no fear
 I'm standing on the last frontier—
 The heartland is the last frontier.²⁷

Thus, the certainty of faith comes from within the heart. The heart informs the believer that his faith, as opposed to other feelings, is real.

A common way in which contemporary Christian music mixes faith and emotion is by using words with sexual connotations to describe it. Silverwind, for example, sings:

Then I looked into your eyes and
 La, la, la, la, la, la . . .
 You took my hand and I gave you my heart.
 Then I looked into your eyes.²⁸

More overtly in their song, "I am in Love," the trio happily boasts:

I am, I am, I am, I am deep in love with Christ.
 I'll be, I'll be, I'll be in love the rest of my life.
 I am, I am, I am, I am deep in love with Christ.
 I'll be, I'll be, I'll be in love the rest of my life.²⁹

Amy grant does the same:

Tell me, have you felt a yearning
 Deep inside a burning need for love . . . ?

Don't run away;
 He wants your heart now.
 Hear what I say
 And play it smart now.
 Wise up today
 And give him all of your love.³⁰

Or consider the lyrics of Stryper's "First Love":

There is no love like the love of your first love.
 It's so true, it's for you as you are,
 Tears in the night filled with pain.
 You're running from love
 That you once had before — your first love.
 Someone to hold you thru the pain,
 To make you smile again
 And to protect you forever . . .³¹

These sexual or emotional lyrics turn Christ into the best love or the most faithful lover or the drug with the highest high or the quickest rush.

E. *The Christian Life*

Contemporary Christian music views the Christian life, not as a gradual process of sanctification by God, but as a two-tiered Christian experience. Sometimes this two-tiered Christianity is expressed in Pentecostal terms. Petra sings:

Long distance run from darkness,
 Headed into the sun,
 It seems like an eternity
 Till this race is won.
 Sullen spirit weak and weary,
 Strength was almost gone,
 When a soothing, gentle breeze
 Carried me farther on.
 I've got my second wind;
 Spirit's coming again.
 I've got a new revelation from the King of kings,
 Found my second wind;
 I feel my strength returning again, returning again.³²

Noteworthy also is the reference to Acts 2 in the title hit "More Power to You," in which the Pentecostal experience is employed as an example of sanctification. In this respect Petra is consistent

with classical Pentecostal theology:

You say you've been feeling weaker, weaker by the day;
 You say you can't make the joy of your salvation stay.
 But good things come to them that wait,
 Not to those who hesitate;
 So hurry up and wait upon the Lord.
 More power to you, when you're standing on His Word,
 When you're trusting with your whole heart
 In the message you have heard.
 More power to you, when we're all in one accord;
 They that wait upon the Lord,
 They shall renew, they shall renew their strength.
 Jesus promised His disciples He'd give strength to them;
 Jesus told them all to tarry in Jerusalem.
 When they were all in one accord,
 The power of the Spirit poured
 And they began to turn the world around.³³

Contemporary Christian music is not always Pentecostal, but it consistently interprets the Christian life as consisting of two levels of Christianity. On the first level are carnal Christians, those Christians who may have faith but who lead defeated or unproductive lives. Once the second level is reached, then true Christian maturity can occur. Degarmo and Key sing a song called "Casual Christian":

It's more than a wish, more than a daydream;
 It's more than just a passing whim.
 Yes, I said this all before,
 A thousand times or more;
 I don't want to waste my life in chains of sin.
 I don't want to be,
 I don't want to be a casual Christian;
 I don't want to live,
 I don't want to live a lukewarm life,
 'Cause I want to light up the night
 With an everlasting light.
 I don't want to live a casual Christian life.
 This life is filled with strong distractions;
 One pulls from the left, one from the right.
 I've already made up my mind,
 Gonna leave this world behind;
 I'm gonna make my life a living sacrifice.³⁴

These lyrics leave the impression that many Christians are "wasting

their lives in chains of sin.” Amy Grant implies the same in her oft heard “I Have Decided”:

I have decided
 I'm gonna live like a believer,
 Turn my back on the deceiver;
 I'm gonna live what I believe.
 I have decided
 Being good is just a fable;
 I just can't 'cause I'm not able.
 I'm gonna leave it to the Lord.
 There's a wealth of things that I profess.
 I said that I believe,
 But deep inside I never changed.
 I guess I've been deceived.
 'Cause a voice inside kept telling me
 That I'd changed by and by,
 But the Spirit made it clear to me
 That kind of life's a lie.³⁵

Either Amy Grant is speaking of conversion, in which case the song is synergistic, or, as seems more likely, she envisions faith as “step one” in the process of salvation and a decision to change as “step two.” The same can be said of her “Fat Baby”:

I know a man maybe you know him too—
 You never can tell he might even be you.
 He knelt at the altar and that was the end;
 He's saved and that's all that matters to him . . .
 He's been baptized, sanctified, redeemed by the blood,
 But his daily devotions are stuck in the mud.
 He knows the books of the Bible and John 3:16;
 He's got the biggest King James you've ever seen . . .
 He's just a fat little baby;
 He wants his bottle and he don't mean maybe.
 He sampled solid food, maybe once or twice,
 But he said doctrine leaves him cold as ice.³⁶

Amy Grant pictures a man who is saved, baptized, sanctified, redeemed, and yet indifferent to God. She can talk this way because in contemporary Christian music's scheme of things baptism, salvation, redemption, and often even sanctification are all first level experiences, while commitment belongs to the second level. Often contemporary Christian music will exhort the listener to make Jesus Lord since it is “not enough just to make Him Savior.” Consequently,

words are used to describe baptized and saved Christians which are usually reserved for unbelievers. One more example of two-tiered theology may help. AD sings:

Only your grace will keep me from treason now.
 My head is reeling in the wake of a delusion;
 Left to myself, I'm so quickly undone.
 Wayward I wander again and again
 Still haunted by sin.
 Who will deliver the unreconciled, the prodigal child?

I can't begin to account for my condition,
 Questions with answers I just can't explain.
 Utterly helpless and nothing to do,
 I'm lost without You; spare the old man and raise up the
 new
 When his time is due.³⁷

The song is about a weak, pathetic Christian who is incapable of any good without a second blessing or some type of religious renewal. While on the surface it may appear as though many of contemporary Christian music's two-blessing songs are referring simply to conversion, usually the lyrics preclude this understanding by talking of "weak faith," or "faith nearly rejected," or "near treason."

Contemporary Christian music has other doctrinal themes. The listener encounters a consistent premillennialism with common exhortations to prepare for the rapture.³⁸ Doctrinal pluralism is viewed as normal or even desirable as long as all Christians have faith.³⁹ Certain contemporary moral or social questions are broached frequently such as the issues of abortion, suicide, and war, all of which contemporary Christian music opposes.

Other doctrines are virtually ignored by contemporary Christian music. The quest for an even rudimentary ecclesiology is fruitless except that Christians are told to go to church. One listens hour upon hour in vain for any positive reference to the Lord's Supper or baptism. The absence of any baptismal theology is especially notable since the central article of contemporary Christian music is the doctrine of the new birth. Also, perhaps surprisingly, no doctrine of the Word of God is obvious. While there are references to Bible verses, neither the normative authority of Scriptures nor the inherent power of God's Word are emphasized by contemporary Christian music.

II. An Evaluation of Contemporary Christian Music

The five-point scheme of trouble, Jesus, decision, emotion, and second blessing remains both the predominant emphasis of contemporary Christian music and a scheme which requires the most serious evaluation. The theology of contemporary Christian music is a musical expression of the Arminian Baptist "evangelicalism" which dominates conservative Reformed Protestantism today. It is a theology with which most Baptists would be quite comfortable but which Lutherans would find deficient at each of the five major points.

A. *The Predicament of Humanity*

Lutherans do not view sin primarily as a weakness or a lack of potential happiness. Using Ephesians 2:1-3, 2 Timothy 2:26, 2 Corinthians 4:4, and other Bible references, Lutherans believe that sin is a rebellion against God inherited from our first parents which results in the complete spiritual depravity of all people and which causes God to be consumed with wrath. Lutherans would be troubled with the view of sin promoted by contemporary Christian music since neither God's anger nor our inherent guilt are emphasized. Especially offensive to Lutherans is the implication that natural man is capable of any intelligent spiritual choice.

B. *Jesus*

Lutherans have always viewed the work of Christ as the central theme of the Bible. Christ, according to the Scriptures, was offered by God as our substitute. He came to live a perfect life in our place. He died, suffering God's anger in our place. All people are set right with God through the forgiveness of sins accomplished by Christ on the cross (2 Corinthians 5, Romans 3). Unfortunately, in contemporary Christian music, Jesus is simply not presented in this way. The theology of contemporary Christian music more closely resembles Baptist theology. Jesus saves, not by His work for us, but by His work in us. He is the way we get strength to go on. He gives us grace to "get us through." Jesus changes our lives enough for us to have confidence. But the objective forgiveness of the cross is consistently overlooked. Ironically even the group Stryper, which derives its name from the healing stripes of Christ in Isaiah 53, rarely expresses the vicarious satisfaction of Jesus Christ.

C. *Coming to Faith*

Lutherans view regeneration as an act of God exclusively. The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit turns us toward Christ by grace alone. Without His grace "the unregenerate man cannot by any native or natural powers in any way understand, believe, accept,

imagine, will, begin, accomplish, do, effect, or cooperate.”⁴⁰ Natural man is unable to decide, make a commitment, invite Jesus into his heart, surrender, yield, or fulfill any other conditions for salvation. The Holy Spirit employs baptism and the Word to work this miracle of new birth in us (John 1:13, John 3:3-5, Titus 3:5). The theology of contemporary Christian music is consistently and overtly unbiblical at this point. It contradicts Scripture because it attributes the new birth either in part or entirely to the will or work of those who are saved. By so doing contemporary Christian music also denies the Reformation Gospel of grace alone. Contemporary Christian music further displays its rejection of the biblical doctrine of faith by teaching that faith fulfills a condition of the Gospel while Scripture teaches that God loves us and forgives us unconditionally because of Christ’s cross. The obvious reluctance of contemporary Christian music to mention the sacraments, especially baptism, is another way in which it betrays a baptistic and unscriptural attitude toward the new birth. The Scriptures teach that baptism is the cause of salvation and rebirth (1 Peter 3:21, Titus 3:5). To encourage conversion almost endlessly but never mention the means of this conversion is an implicit denial of the regenerative power of baptism. It would be similar to a lengthy discussion of freeway travel with no mention of cars.

D. The Nature of Faith

Lutherans understand faith to be “trust in God’s mercy which forgives sins for Christ’s sake.”⁴¹ While faith may or may not be emotional, it is certainly neither valued for the emotions it engenders nor identified by these feelings. Lutherans value faith because it clings to Christ and identify its existence by the Word and sacraments which create it. Luther says, “When you no longer accord the Word greater validity than your every feeling, your eyes, your sense, and your heart, you are doomed and you can no longer be helped . . . If I were to judge according to my feeling, I would perish . . . But the Word conveys a different message, namely, that I have a gracious God through Christ.”⁴² Unfortunately, contemporary Christian music leaves the strong impression that without strong “heart feelings,” a spiritual “high,” or passionate emotions of love faith is in doubt. Faith is often valued and identified by its visible or sensory manifestations.

E. The Christian Life

Lutherans are reluctant to speak of two levels of Christianity. They recognize that all who have been baptized into Christ are complete,

as the apostle says (Colossians 2:10). And while the old sinful flesh will always encumber Christians on this side of the grave, every Christian, no matter how weak, is a member of Christ's body and "a sharer and joint owner of all the goods it possesses."⁴³ When Lutherans sense their weakness or feel temptation they do not wait for "a second wind" or "make up their minds to leave the world behind." Lutherans do not periodically decide to live like believers or disparage those who have not grown up but have been merely "baptized, sanctified, redeemed by the blood." Lutherans seek their strength from Christ through His Supper where they "receive . . . forgiveness of sin, which contains and brings with it the grace of God and the Spirit with all His gifts, protection, shelter, and power against death and the devil and all misfortune."⁴⁴ The two-level doctrine of contemporary Christian music contradicts the Scripture on three accounts. First, it teaches that some Christians do not possess all of Christ's blessings even though baptized and saved. Secondly, it visualizes an indifferent, defeated, apathetic person who intends not to serve God and lives in chains of sin as still a Christian. The Holy Spirit does not create that kind of faith. Thirdly, it often implies that Christians can escape the inclinations of the flesh this side of the grave.

III. Conclusions

Lutherans, then, find the theology of contemporary Christian music deficient at almost every point. And Lutherans, it would seem, will be as cool in their support of contemporary Christian music as they have traditionally been in support of local Baptist congregational ministries, Baptist Sunday schools, Baptist tract ministries, Baptist television evangelists or Baptist missionary work.

A conscientious Lutheran pastor will caution against contemporary music even if reasons to advocate it seem to commend themselves. Perhaps there are many excellent songs which are biblical and entertaining. But Baptist hymnals contain many such songs and Lutherans have not encouraged their use. Perhaps many Lutheran advocates of contemporary Christian music employ the medium only to praise God and not to offer doctrinal instruction. But the songs offer enough false doctrine to make their value negligible. And few people will place the tape on fast forward each time heterodoxy negates doxology. Perhaps isolated songs or albums or even artists will express little overt false doctrine. But the predominant themes are Baptist. When we advocate one song or album, we often implicitly advocate the entire genre. Even the Rolling Stones, normally bawdy and disgusting, have a beautiful song entitled "The Prodigal Son."⁴⁵

We do not, however, talk of the Stones as a Christian alternative to rock music. Perhaps this or that Christian claims to have grown spiritually through contemporary Christian music or to have gained insight into things spiritual. But Lutherans evaluate their insights and spiritual growth only by God's Word. Perhaps contemporary Christian music is preferable to the satanic and sex-laden expressions of some pop-rock. Parents would rather have Petra in the house than Judas Priest. Amy is better than Ozzy. But teenagers today have more choices than either satanism or synergism. Christians do not make moral or theological choices by asking which of two evils is better. We do not smoke marijuana because it is better than alcoholism. False dichotomies should be exposed, not indulged. The only Lutheran response to contemporary Christian music is to inform people that it is predominantly Baptist theology which undermines the Gospel and does not glorify Christ. The arguments favoring its use do not stand.

Lutherans can pray for the day when genuine Lutheran and truly evangelical music dominates the Christian music scene. We can implore God to bestow upon the airwaves music which promotes a sacramental theology. We can petition the Almighty to grace Christian bookstores with albums which give all glory to the Holy Spirit in the new birth. We can beseech our God to bless the top ten Christian songs with lyrics which present the vicarious atonement of Jesus. Until these prayers are answered Lutherans will balk at an endorsement of contemporary Christian music and will expect to hear in it a Gospel unfamiliar to our ears.

Endnotes

1. Stryper, "The Rock That Makes Me Roll," *Soldiers under Command* (Enigma Records, El Segundo, California, 1985).
2. Degarmo and Key, "Apathy Alert," *Commander Sozo and the Charge of the Light Brigade* (Power Discs, Nashville, Tennessee, 1985).
3. Silverwind, "Give Him Your Heart," *Silverwind* (Sparrow Records, Canoga Park, California, 1981).
4. AD, "Progress," *Art of the State* (Kerygma Records, Reseda, California, 1985).
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6. Stryper, "Together Forever," op. cit.; cf. also Carmen, "Som-O-Dat," *Carmen* (Priority Records, New York, New York, 1982).
7. Silverwind, "Give Him Your Heart," op. cit.
8. Amy Grant, "Don't Run Away," *Age to Age* (Word, Inc., Waco, Texas,

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9. Stryper, "The Rock That Makes Me Roll," *Soldiers under Command*, op. cit.
 10. Amy Grant, "Find a Way," *Unguarded*, op. cit.
 11. Degarmo and Key, "Temporary Things," op. cit.
 12. David Meese, "Are You Ready," *Are You Ready* (Word, Inc., Waco, Texas, 1980).
 13. Resurrection Band, "Can't Get You Outta My Mind," *Mommy Don't Love Daddy Anymore* (Light Records, Waco, Texas, 1981).
 14. Petra, "All Over Me," *More Power to You* (Star Song Records, Pasadena, Texas, 1982).
 15. Amy Grant, "Don't Run Away," *Age to Age*, op. cit.
 16. Carmen, "Som-O-Dat," op. cit.
 17. Keith Green, "Keith Shares ... Altar Call," *I Only Want to See You There* (Sparrow Records, Canoga Park, California, 1983).
 18. Darrell Mansfield, "Don't Let Them Stand in Your Way," *Revelation* (Broken Records, Tapes, and Video, Waco, Texas, 1985.)
 19. Stryper, "Reach Out," op. cit.
 20. Ibid., "Surrender."
 21. White Heart, "Gotta Be a Believer," *Hotline* (Home Sweet Home Records, Waco, Texas, 1982).
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 23. Keith Green, "Promise Song," *Songs for the Shepherd* (Pretty Good Records-Last Days Ministries, Lindale, Texas, 1982).
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 25. Carmen, "Som-O-Dat," op. cit.
 26. Ibid., "Surrender."
 27. AD, "Heartland," *Art of the State*, op. cit.
 28. Silverwind, "When I Looked into Your Eyes," op. cit.
 29. Ibid., "I Am in Love," op. cit.
 30. Amy Grant, "Don't Run Away," *Age to Age*, op. cit.
 31. Stryper, "First Love," op. cit.
 32. Petra, "Second Wind," op. cit.
 33. Ibid., "More Power to You.
 34. Degarmo and Key, "Casual Christian," op. cit.
 35. Amy Grant, "I Have Decided," *Age to Age*, op. cit.
 36. Ibid., "Fat Baby."
 37. AD, "Lead Me to Reason," op. cit.
 38. Rap'sures, "Theme Song"; AD, "The Fury"; Degarmo and Key, "Jesus is Coming," op. cit.
 39. Amy Grant, "Fat Baby," op. cit.
 40. FC-SD II, 7.

41. AC IV.
42. *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaraslov Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia Publishing House and Fortress Press, 1955-1972), 28, p. 71.
43. LC II, 52.
44. LC V, 70.
45. Rolling Stones, "Prodigal Son," *Beggar's Banquet* (London Records, London, England, 1971).

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