

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD
YOUTH MINISTRIES

MUSIC SELECTION RULE CLARIFICATION

Leadership is not the task of simply providing answers. Often it is about reframing questions. Students walk into our ministries and our lives asking many questions. Caring and thoughtful youth workers will reframe those questions in such a way that God's truth can be discovered and the hope of Jesus can be known.

A conversation has been ongoing within the Fine Arts community related to musical selections for entries. The question being asked is: "Should Fine Arts allow the use of secular music?" One of the challenges with that question is that it leads to many other questions:

- How do we define secular music?
- What about Christmas (or positive message) songs performed by mainstream artists?
- What about Christian artists covering mainstream music?
- What about Christian artists who are represented by a mainstream label?
- What about songs by Christian artists that contain inaccurate or shallow theology?
- What about Christian artists whose lives display little Christ-like fruit?
- What about instrumental music?

And on and on...

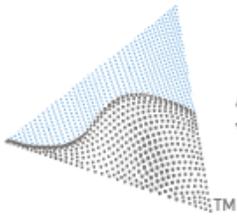
Even if you believe you have answers to each of these questions, it is important to realize that not everyone in the body of Christ will agree. One of the reasons is that our personal preferences and convictions are closely tied to our cultural context, geographical location, life experiences, church traditions, and interpretation of Scripture. There's no avoiding that reality; it's the very reason this conversation is happening.

Some questions only raise more questions. Some questions aren't the most helpful ones to be asking. So what questions should we be asking? Let me suggest three.

1) What is the purpose of Fine Arts?

First and foremost, Fine Arts is a discipleship tool. Any metric used to evaluate the success of Fine Arts must revolve around local church discipleship. Fine Arts' purpose is to help teenagers discover, develop and deploy their gifts. But this does not simply mean assisting them in getting better at what they do-drawing, acting, preaching. It also means helping teenagers discover the Giver of the gift, develop a biblically informed understanding of the purpose of the gift and





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deploy the gift in a manner that best stewards the gift, shares the Gospel and glorifies the Giver.

Ultimately Fine Arts should be a discipleship tool that creates a healthy environment for teenagers to wrestle with the following two questions.

2) How can the Christian artist be faithful to the Gospel while intentionally and redemptively engaging culture?

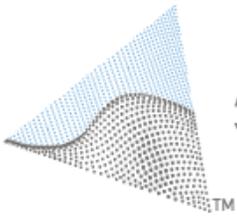
Most of the New Testament writings can be categorized as either a reminder of the truth and beauty of the Gospel, or as exhortations and instructions on how to live lives that respond to and reflect the Gospel in the midst of a hostile culture. Christians cannot rightly engage culture without having their hearts engaged by Christ, but they also cannot engage the truth of God apart from culture. Christianity is not an ahistorical faith-it is unavoidably steeped in specific places, times, and cultures. Everyone's understanding of God is profoundly influenced by the surrounding culture.

Jesus helped people understand the kingdom of God by telling stories filled with cultural examples. In other words he did not reveal supernatural truths by avoiding natural language. The idea that we can engage Jesus or spiritual truth completely apart from culture is actually more in keeping with Gnosticism than Christianity.

It's also interesting to note that even before the fall, Adam had a mandate to be a "culture-maker." He was responsible to care for and develop a garden; this was a central part of his being an image bearer. And when God wanted to talk to Adam and Eve, he did not whisk them away for a mystical encounter. He came down and walked in the Garden with them! God can reveal himself to us in and through culture. The Bible is in our language, in our hands and on our phones because of cultural developments. Culture is not the enemy; it is often the vehicle through which God reveals his truth.

In Acts 17, Paul walks into a highly secular pluralistic environment (sound familiar?) and proceeds to quote their poets and reference their art. He doesn't rail against their culture, he doesn't ignore their culture, and he doesn't hide from their culture. Instead he redirects their thinking and engages their culture for redemptive purposes. In other words he takes the stories that their art is telling and repurposes them, using them to point to THE story. He can do this because all truth is God's truth and even the artistic expressions from the heart of the lost can point to humanity's need for Jesus. Every mainstream song is telling a story. What if Fine Arts





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became the tool to help teach our students how to use the arts to challenge and redeem those stories to retell the Gospel story?

In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, Paul explains that he gladly adapts to his audience for the sake of the Gospel. This is not compromise. This is a refusal to let anything be an obstacle to knowing Jesus other than the Gospel itself. Living with a missional mindset means a willingness to speak the language and enter the world of the people we are called to reach. Is it possible that in some cases using easily recognizable mainstream music will help draw and reach more unbelievers than using a song by a Christian artist?

3) How can we best prepare our teenagers in a world that promotes mindless consumption of art?

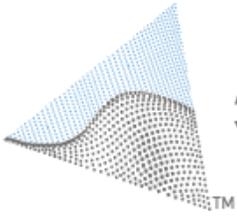
A great danger to our teenagers is the general lack of thought in creating art and in consuming art. Labeling music as Christian or non-Christian may be convenient or comforting, but it doesn't necessarily help generate biblically informed thinking about art. Our young people need to learn how to ask helpful questions when watching movies, listening to music, reading books, or viewing art. They need to develop the ability to filter out lies and celebrate truth and beauty. Even some Christian music contains theology that some would consider shallow at best and heretical at worst. What better time for students to learn about how to interpret art than when they're still in the homes of their parents and in our youth ministries?

The church is hemorrhaging artists and one of the reasons may be that we stymie their creativity by placing outside demands on their art. When the purpose of art is determined before it's even made, the creativity suffers. Our God is a creator and in our creating, we bear his image. Christian artists need to be affirmed in their creativity and invited to glorify God not just with their product, but also with the process.

Final Thoughts

The real issue in this conversation lies where all real issues lie—in our hearts. The decision a person makes about musical selection is less important than the reason he or she makes it. It's entirely possible for someone to choose "sacred music" and to do so because it makes them feel superior and more righteous than those who choose differently. It's also possible that choosing to use mainstream music is motivated by a desire to shock or offend. Neither heart motivation is in line with the Gospel. Our righteousness is in Christ, not in tending to our personal preferences and convictions. Our freedom in Christ is not an opportunity to send a confrontational message to others. There is a better way!





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NYM recognizes that the wording of the rule is too strict for some and too vague for others. NYM is also leaving room for DYDs to lead their districts as led by the Spirit and informed by their cultural context.

It's been said: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." In John 17, Jesus prayed that we would be one and promised that the world would recognize us by our love for each other. Rather than being divided over different opinions let's pursue unity, let's walk in honor, and let's witness the rising up of a generation of Jesus-loving Spirit-filled artists who breathe life into the dead places through the powerful gift of art.



TEEN BIBLE QUIZ



YOUTH ALIVE*



fine arts



SPEED THE LIGHT*

