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Power in music

After posting last week's article on "Water to Wine," I needed to go to Colville population 4500, to pick up some supplies that included a used open top plastic drum. As a consequence I needed to take my Dodge Dakota, which has a hard wired iPod connection to what once was called a radio. Cranking up my 5 star playlist, I was soon enjoying my favorite songs.

It was after about three songs when it hit me. I can bloviate about world and church problems until I am blue in the face. I can pontificate until the Pope becomes a Protestant. I can do that other stuff until the cows come home, but it really is not going to make a significant difference in the world unless written words, by me and more significant others, are interpreted in music. Music in all its forms is the ultimate human expression that we are indeed creatures designed in the image of God, for timeless fellowship with

our Creator inclusively within a redeemed human family.

They say that music can calm the savage beast. None of us like to be considered savages, but music specifically, and other forms of art generically, are what is going to change or restore culture. I first began to understand this artistic concept through the work of Francis Schaeffer, but since that time, that has been confirmed by my own empirical evidence, as well as many other writers and musicians. If the current world is going to change significantly towards either a traditional or a more progressive agenda, it is going to be accompanied by music. As I once heard an old gospel musician say, music that gets down into your soul.

The latest world changing music experience probably began in the early 1960s with the emergence of rock and roll. This was really in many respects a rebellion of the tacit life of the



post war prosperity of suburbia and American life in general. With the reality of the Viet Nam war these songs of rebellion became more vibrant, eventually being a causative agent for the hippie movement, as well as in the church where hippies got saved and were soon known as Jesus People.

I was not part of that opportunity. During that time I was stationed in Germany protecting our freedom from the Soviet threat stemming from the Warsaw Pact, while many of my friends were dying in Viet Nam. After my return to the States I remember while readjusting to American material life, I had a long discussion about Christianity, with one of the Jesus People who was witnessing at Eastern Washington University.

Jesus People music was really the basis for the renewal of Christianity from the dead orthodoxy of the liberal denominationalism of my youth. Furthermore it could be deductively reasoned that music was the basis by which modern evangelicalism developed. In later years I spent more than a decade at Calvary Fellowship in Seattle, which was the local first generation outpost of Calvary Chapel. During that time I got to hear and meet with many of those early musicians who, through their music, changed the church. For the most part they are still doing their thing, still serving the Lord, and somewhat disturbed to appalled, with what has happened to their music and the church.

Today worship in most non liturgical churches is defined by choruses, which trace their roots to that Maranatha type music of the late 1960s and early 1970s. As this music degraded from those early musicians to what is now known as Contemporary Christian Music, we can also see the increase in materialism within evangelicalism, and as we noted last week and in other columns, the marginalization of Christianity within the culture.

So today's Christian music really is not about what Jesus did, it is plastic music designed and marketed to make you feel good emotionally about having your best life now in a vain, narcissistic culture. It finds its way into church, because fresh choruses are part of this liturgy, especially if it is devoid of true Christian theology.

While I said most of those early musicians are still serving the Lord, if you have the chance to attend a concert by Terry Clark and Catalyst Ministries, you can perhaps get a glimpse of church worship that era had to offer.

Since my move to Eastern Washington, I have had the opportunity to attend other churches that attempt to follow or imitate that type of service liturgy. They should stick to what God used to create them to do in the first place. I suppose that means they need to get back to the basics, just as with today's evangelicalism. The basics revolve about worship, praise, and gratitude about what Jesus Christ did by his life, death and resurrection, not about feeling good about yourself or how you become a success in this life.

Now a renewal is required within the church to bring about a change in the culture, but that renewal must venture beyond the cloister of the Sunday service. If music can change society and culture it must be able to relate to culture. There are twenty one songs on my 5 star iTunes playlist, only two of those would I consider Christian, and those are from the Jesus music era. The first three on the list are labeled under the country genre. The first is about life happening in society today, the second is about doing what you were created to do, and the third reflecting about the reality of life.

Last week we looked at the trinity of human understanding of the salvation progression. The first was the Calvinist: Guilt Grace Gratitude. Then there was my spin on wearing your CAP: Condemnation Adoption Praise. Finally we had the more fundamentalist Sin Repentance Worship.

The result of all three progressions is you end up with Gratitude, Praise, and Worship. You could say that gratitude is more literary and reasoned, as you might expect from a Calvinist. My praise, was more emotional and perhaps less reasoned, and finally fundamentalist worship, which is much more sobering and majestic. The question becomes how can you put all three together and end up with something that reflects upon Divine truth, is still simple enough to understand, and at the same time reflects upon the ultimate nature of God?

I just tried to do it in words and I ended up with a question rather than a response. The only way to

pull this all together is through music, or song, something not in my bag of gifts, other than singing along with my iPod. If you look at music however, especially historic American music, one type of music seems to come closer to meeting that encompassing criteria than any other, and that is what is known as Bluegrass.

To draw a somewhat broad generalization about Bluegrass music, it is basically hill country music from West Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky. This area was settled by many Scotch Irish immigrants who brought from the old country a Celtic music heritage. They came to find land in the Appalachian Mountains, but in many cases ended up working in coalmines to support their families.

The Scottish side of those immigrants were definitely Protestant, Calvinist Protestant, which when mixed with the American religion of revivalism would have a tendency to produce upbeat music with a little more depth than a flat land dirge. That Roman Catholic liturgical side of the Irish peasants would, also bring a deeper understanding of the encompassing reality of Godly worship. So what you see in Bluegrass music is perhaps the best blending of gratitude, praise, and worship into one art form that in many cases is at home in church, on the concert stage, or on the front porch.

If you look at the songs on my 5 star iTunes playlist most of them have Bluegrass roots. Could it be that we are really not all that distant from our roots? On my mother's side of the family, her mother can be traced through that Bluegrass Region through Missouri to Washington. Her father's father and mother go back to Denmark. On my dad's side, his mother's side can be traced to Wittenberg, Germany. His father's father becomes more difficult. There is an 1870 census record of a John W. Bannon of the right age, living with a single mom, in Lexington, Kentucky, she being born in Ireland in 1811. Whether she was a Civil War widow, or some other of life's mishaps, we have not been able to determine at this time. If true however Kentucky is the home of real bluegrass grass.

What this is all trying to point out is that perhaps the music that will be responsible for

beginning to again focus this country on the more important things of life will have Bluegrass roots and also routes. In that light we followed Kathy Mattea's Coal project and album last year. That number three song on my iTunes 5 star playlist is "You'll Never Leave Harlan Alive" from that album.

Coal is America's most abundant energy resource. Other than talk about green jobs the Obama Administration has yet to look seriously at anything related to domestic energy production. Even in the most optimistic productive spin, renewable energy technologies cannot come close to meeting America's future energy requirements. Someday there will be a larger coal reality in America's future. How that coal future is developed is of stupendous importance to the economic and environmental health of Bluegrass Country, as well as the rest of the nation and the world. The "Coal" album was an attempt to shape that discussion through music.

What is needed now is a broader attempt to shape the current discussion of America's future through music. It is not about playing the music backwards, so that you can get back your truck, your dog, your house, and maybe your wife or girl friend. It needs to be music about what made this country unique in history and how those standards are being eroded through selfish, debt driven, materialism; coupled with spurious leadership and only situational accountability.

In other words we need songs of gratitude, praise, and worship in both the truly religious sense but just as importantly the secular sense. The difficult task, which we try to do at Wonder Springs, is to tension both with integrity based in the reality of Natural and Revealed Law as well as Common and Specific grace.

It has been a long time since we have asked for help in doing anything here. But this really isn't a Wonder Springs project; it is a project to develop a new genre of American music for the times in which we live. Perhaps we can be the facilitator. The best way to make sure you finish in Somewhere is to start in Nowhere. Nowhere is where we are, and in that case everyone will know that success is not the result of solely human efforts.

I would like to hear from you and how you would like to play a part, even if that doesn't mean

singing, playing, or composing. That might also mean forwarding this to someone who might have something to do with really making music that we all need to hear, put on our iPods and even play in church. The Internet is the vehicle that can take this new music from dusty country road to broad urban boulevards. The price of this gas is hidden within our various Internet access fees.

Music of Gratitude Praise Worship
reinforce the foundations of human peace within
as well as peace with God. That is what makes
music transcendent and all too often words, just
words.

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