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Subject Music

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ELLEN G. WHITE ESTATE—QUESTION AND ANSWER FILE

August 20, 1963

40 Forest Drive
North Haledon, New Jersey

My dear Brother

It was nice to see you, your brother, and Mrs. Figuhr in our office this morning. I haven't forgotten your request for information from the pen of Sister White on the subject of music.

You have the new comprehensive three-volume Index to the Writings of Mrs. Ellen G. White. Since the subject is a large one with many different facets, or more properly "strings," you had better get a well rounded picture so that the "harp" will be in tune and every string will be used and a satisfying melody will be played!

Check the word "voice;" "song," also, and you will receive excellent guidance. We have a pamphlet in our office, out of print now, titled "Ministry of the Voice." It is a collection of E. G. White statements on this vital subject. At present I am working out a compilation titled Principles of True Science. We have a section in there on the voice--all from Sister White's pen, of course.

Music belongs to Christianity as much as Old Faithful belongs to Yellowstone. Music is an overflow; it is a steam valve, call it what you will. It is a release, an outlet for the soul's emotion and deep feeling. But Christian music expresses more than feeling. Theology in its deeper aspects appears in the words to the hymns and gospel songs. It is a teaching ministry, also, and has been used by God to fix in the mind passages of Scripture, promises, commands, and historical truths and incidents.

Back in 1849, when Present Truth was born, the first Adventist hymnbook appeared. James White was the compiler. There were no bars and musical notes, just the words. Standard tunes were used to sing the words to many "songs." Hymns and Tunes came along and introduced bars, musical notes and the symbols of melody.

Sister White deplored the use of music to display the talents of the singers, merely. She equally deplored the church desk as a place to display the talents of the orator. Preaching, music, both were instruments in the hands of God's

servants to win men for Christ, to establish the church in purity, doctrine, and faith.

Mrs. White liked cheerful hymns like "There is Sunlight on the Hilltops." "Rock of Ages" was a favorite of hers.

Many questions have come into our office through the years dealing with the propriety of certain types of church music, also the propriety of wearing church choir robes, etc. We find nothing in Sister White's writings dealing with the question of choir robes, but I think that if she were living she would approve them. On one occasion she saw one of our schoolgirls dressed in a uniform and she expressed herself as well pleased with the appearance of the little girl.

Sister White discouraged the hiring of worldly musicians for Adventist choirs if this could be avoided. "Gather together singers who will sing with the spirit and with the understanding also," she wrote in Evangelism, page 509. Read the entire page from Evangelism just referred to for guidance in this question of music in evangelistic campaigns.

Mrs. White encouraged singing by congregations rather than so much solo or quartet work. She did not deplore singing by quartets, however. On Sabbath, May 2, 1909, Sister White was the speaker at the General Conference. She read from the Scriptures and at one point she paused while a male quartet sang, "The Dream of Pilot's Wife." Sister White believed in emphasizing, or perhaps I should say amplifying, the message of the word with well chosen songs.

On another occasion Mrs. White attended a meeting in the Midwest. The woman singing was dressed in fancy clothing and with jewels. Sister White remarked to a friend that it was deplorable that this woman occupied the time singing when the entire congregation could have been singing. This was not a condemnation of solo singing, but it was an attempt to emphasize the need for more group singing. Also it was to reveal the Lord's displeasure with singing when the purpose is merely to glorify the singer or to show off the singer's talents, show off his influence.

Satan has taken advantage of music as he has many legitimate things and he has misused it. The churches misuse it; we all misuse it. But it is a blessing when properly used and a really worthwhile agency for the conversion of souls.

Read Vol. I of the Testimonies, page 497. Sister White, speaking about young men and women, said, "They have a keen ear for music, and Satan knows what organs to excite to animate, engross, and charm the mind so that Christ is not desired." . . . Frivolous songs and the popular sheet music of the day seem congenial to their taste."

Certainly Sister White is here exposing the misuse of music. "Satan is leading the young captive. . . He is a skillful charmer, luring them on to perdition." -- Ibid. How true the foregoing statement is.

I think that if Sister White were living today she would deplore the use of the so-called "gospel songs" with jazz airs attached to the words. It

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is regrettable to listen to the jazzy pepped-up gospel songs--so-called-- that are sometimes heard. This is not to speak against gospel songs used in Gospel Melodies, etc. but to regret the use of worldly tunes attached to Christian sentiments expressed in the stanzas of songs. Equally deplorable is the use of the romantic type air when adapted to church or gospel music. This is done frequently. Sometimes I hear young people sing such songs with their modern accent on romance and I wonder how God must feel about some of this music.

Well, I must close, Brother Appel. I hope that something that has been said in this letter has proven helpful. Thank God for music. Let's use it to the limit. Let's use the bright and cheerful and hopeful music. There is a tendency today, particularly, to be influenced by the music of Bach but there is a mournful overtone to some of this music. Let the Advent music be bright and cheerful and full of hope, expressive of our confidence in the triumph of the gospel and the power of Jesus to save. There is room for music in the minor key but let us have more positive, moving, triumphant songs. For example "Lift Up the Trumpet," "A Mighty Fortreas is Our God," etc.

Sincerely your brother,

D. A. Delafield, Associate Secretary
ELLEN G. WHITE PUBLICATIONS

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