



Toxic Shock

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“Extraordinary how potent cheap music is.” Noel Coward

Imagine a hot summer day as a young family cools off in the shallow end of a community pool. Suddenly, the father notices a group of people, obviously dirty and intoxicated, jumping in at the other end. Thanking God for chlorine, he instinctively places himself between them and his two young children. His disgust turns to alarm, however, when a straggler appears and begins to empty a large drum of what looks and smells like raw sewage into the water. He stares in disbelief as the rabble splash about in the widening circle of filth.

Quickly, he gathers up his children and climbs out of the pool. “Hey!” he yells to the other end. “What do you think you’re doing?!”

“Having fun,” the straggler responds, throwing down the now empty drum, “What’s it to you?”

“You’re polluting our water with your filth!”

“Look, buddy, it’s our water, too,” shouts back one of the swimmers, his friends laughing and nodding in agreement. “If you don’t like it, don’t swim down here. You’ve got your own end ... stay there.”

“Yeah! And mind your own business!” echoes the polluter, walking a new drum to the edge of the pool and removing its lid.

Today, a very similar scene is being played out in the “communal pool” of popular culture. In the name of artistic freedom, catharsis, experimentation, *argumentum ad nauseum* (few would admit to the “anything to make a buck” justification) – many of today’s artists are creating works that are the aesthetic equivalent of sewage. Sexually debauched, violent, vapid, nihilistic, misogynistic, anti-Christian entertainments spill into our cultural “biosphere” at a rate and with a virulence that would be viewed as an act of psychological terrorism were they masterminded by some outside agency.

Its affect on the reservoir of popular culture? These contagions have spread into even the children’s drinking water; into the shallow end of the pool. KISS now opens the Super Bowl and John Lennon’s hymn to humanism, *Imagine*, closes the Olympics. The cost in human souls? Millions of hardened hearts... and softened minds. Christian standards of modesty, chastity, decency, charity, respect, reverence, self-control, self-sacrifice, and love are steadily chipped away. What’s “true, good and beautiful” is sacrificed in favor of tattoos, piercings, South Park (and a 101 other shows like it), professional wrestling, political correctness, gangster chic, sound bite-driven social discourse and \$150.00 sneakers.

In the words of writer and cultural analyst Neil Postman, we are literally amusing ourselves to death.

In the face of this extraordinary cultural crisis, what are Christians to do? Having been commissioned by our resurrected Lord to “disciple the nations” (Matt.28:19), simply ignoring or complaining about the problem is not an option. God calls us “salt and light” (Matt. 5:13 & 15); springs of heavenly water that are to heal the waters of the sea. (Ezekiel 47:1-8) What steps can we then take to be faithful to this calling – to protect both ourselves and our families from these contaminants AND to help clean up the pool of popular culture?

First, we must wake-up from our culturally induced sleep and, as the saying goes, smell the coffee. This starts by rediscovering – and then “binding to our foreheads” (Deut. 6:8) – the great truth that resonates throughout the Bible: “For as a man thinks in his heart, so is he.” (Prov. 23:7)

Regardless of religious persuasion – or lack thereof – most people still acknowledge the invisible world of “mind” or “soul” that percolates within each of us. And as we turn our attention to this interior world, it becomes readily apparent that it is profoundly affected, if not controlled, by the ideas and beliefs that take root in our hearts. (Recently, a number of scientists providentially underscored this power by coining the term “meme” to describe a discreet packet of information (an idea) that reproduces itself by

infecting host organisms (other minds) and then spreading to others.) It is no wonder then that God's Word overflows with sober admonitions to watch over our hearts (Prov. 4:23), renew our minds (Rom. 12:2), take every thought captive (2 Cor. 10:5), and be on guard against false philosophies (Col. 2:8). In a post-modern world that rejects even the notion of absolute truth – and hence the ultimate importance of beliefs – we need to be walking, talking apologists for the power of ideas.

Secondly, we must understand and emphasize the special power ideas, or menes, have when they are born on the wings of art. While it remains vital that Christians continue to articulate and defend the biblical worldview in the arenas of politics, education, theology, and philosophy, we need to also realize that these areas increasingly take their cues from the music, movies and television shows that make up our popular culture. As 18th century Scottish writer, orator and Parliamentarian, Andrew Fletcher, declared: "...if a man were permitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who should make the laws of a nation." Modern technologies and sensibilities have increased the power of these ballads a hundred fold, making it all the more critical that we, as Shakespeare wrote, "Mark the music".

An excellent tool for doing this – and helping spread this truth – is our documentary, *Hell's Bells 2: The Power and Philosophy of Popular Music*. This explosive and compelling exposé features state-of-the-art production values and weaves together musicology, satire, testimony, man-in-the-street interviews, parabolic drama, anecdotal information, voluminous research and a non-preachy Christian worldview to explore and then prove Plato's maxim: "When the mode of the music changes, the walls of the city shake." Space prohibits any extensive quoting here, but let me leave you with just one nugget from the gold mine this video presents. *Billboard Magazine* recently featured an essay on the power of music written by a brain specialist and consultant to the entertainment industry. The doctor discusses the powerful way music interacts, often subconsciously, with receptors in the brain to "...produce endorphin highs"; to "...trigger a flood of emotions and images that have the ability to instantaneously produce very powerful changes in emotional states". He closes his commentary with the observation: "Take it from a brain guy: In 25 years of working with the brain, I still cannot affect a person's state of mind the way that one simple song can." (Billboard; 1/23/99; p. 23)

Thirdly, understanding these first two points, we need to turn off the "city water" that flows from Babylon and get serious about seeking and drinking the "fountain of living water" that Jesus spoke about to the woman at the well. (John 4:14) The Bible teems with strong cautions and admonitions to not become "troubled fountains" or "corrupted springs" (Prov.25:26); to not

“be conformed to the world” but rather instead to be “transformed by the renewing of our minds”. (Rom. 12:2) Tragically, most Christians today are far more likely to know the hour that *Friends* or *Frazier* comes on – than the hour in which Jesus died on the cross.

Perhaps the Holy Spirit’s words through David do the best job of presenting the dichotomy that exists between the City of God and the City of Man; and how Christians are to resolve the tension between them. “I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I hate the work of those who fall away; it shall not cling to me...My eyes are on the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me; He who walks in a perfect way, He shall serve me.” (Psalm 101)

Finally, having cleansed ourselves, we need to prayerfully confront the serpent and his seed on the field of battle, laboring to stop the pollution and “re-chlorinate” the pool of popular culture.

Now some people’s view of the “last days” may keep them from having any hope for success in this grand undertaking, but our Lord’s clear command for us to be salt and light – occupying until He returns (Luke 19:14) – leaves us no choice. We must labor to “disciple the nation” because our Lord commands it and because we are to love and care for those dying in the pool. And keep in mind that even for us – this side of death – there is no *ultimate* escape from these defilements. Short of absolute monasticism, you and I live in this world – we have no choice but swim to some degree in the pool of popular culture.

Having done all the above, then, the Christian is ready to boldly enter the fray. As we pray – and prayer is central to this battle – our prayers will prevail because they are no longer weighted down with the leaven of compromise. As we testify to our neighbors concerning the truth, those testimonies will overcome the evil one because they will bear witness to the blood and the power of a consecrated life. (Rev. 12:11) As we turn from the harlotries of this world – hungering and thirsting instead for righteousness – the Lord will move to satisfy that desire; even that desire as it is expressed through our God-given hunger for music, art and story-telling. (I have often wondered if the one key answer to the common complaint (excuse?) believers raise concerning the lack of quality Christian art is, “Don’t expect a beautiful temple to be built if you are busy dancing about the golden calf.”) (see Exodus 32; Num. 11:5 & 6) And as we seek to think trans-generationally (Prov. 13:22); to see the glory of Christ infuse every aspect of human culture (2 Cor. 10:5); and to settle for nothing less than genuine commitment to excellence (Exodus 31:3) we will see – if not in our lifetimes,

then in perhaps our children's – new Bachs, Hildegards of Bingen, Miltons, Hopkins, Eliots', or Lewis'.

On that day, even those whose eyes and ears have not yet fully opened by the Holy Spirit will see the "house (the Church) has built" and declare, "Happy are those that stand before you and hear your wisdom!" (see 1 Kings 10:1-9)

Long live Christendom!

And suddenly a chorus of voices joined the father's challenge. "Get out of here! Take your sewage somewhere else!" And one by one, the people arose... and began to clean the pool.