

Ex-Worship Leader: Why I Left the CCM Movement

Dan Lucarini, a former worship leader, had to get away from the contemporary Christian music (CCM) movement. No, he's not a fundamentalist "stuck in the old ways", he says. But he's a Christian who says he realized CCM was man-centered and unavoidably associated with a spirit of immorality. While the use of CCM in churches is an old and probably tired debate, Lucarini's book, 'Why I left the CCM Movement', is in its 20th printing, seven years after it was first published.

"It continues to, I guess, touch a nerve for some folks in the church today", Lucarini told the Christian Post in a recent interview in Denver, Colorado. When the book first came out in 2002, Lucarini thought it would be just part of the "transitional period" around 2002-2003. But today, people still have the same questions about CCM and about worship in the church. He said, "As long as we have Christians and churches and we're in the world, we're going to be struggling with how much of the world should we bring in and how fast and at what point do we offend and scandalize other Christians."

A former rock musician (keyboardist, singer, and composer) from the Baby Boomer generation, Lucarini became a worship leader just as CCM was beginning to take over church services in the late 1980's to 1990's. He was a new born-again believer at the time and was happy to use his talents for God. He helped a couple of churches transition from traditional to contemporary worship services. He thought he had all the right motives and enthusiastically promoted the acceptance of CCM in evangelical and fundamental churches.

"We used the excuse that we wanted to reach out to the young people", Lucarini said. "You know what? They didn't like the music. It was our music. It was classic rock. We just did it for ourselves. That was the conclusion that I came to. ... Let's be honest about it. It wasn't to save souls. It was just because we liked that kind of music and we're the rebellious generation so we just basically thought we could do whatever we wanted", he added.

Nearly 20 years later, CCM is a staple in many churches, and the younger generation of believers has for the most part grown up on it and thus do not see the controversy in it. So when Lucarini and other like-minded Christians challenge the popular music style in church services, they're often labeled as legalistic Pharisees and dismissed because of the generation gap. But Lucarini reminds readers that they cannot dismiss him as being a traditionalist considering how heavily involved he was in both the secular rock music and Christian praise and worship scenes.

The heart of his argument is that rock music, and all forms of it, is a music style that was created by immoral men for immoral purposes. Whether it's soft rock, pop rock, jazz, praise and worship, Chris Tomlin, Delirious, or Hillsong, CCM is "scandalous and offensive because of where it came from and what it means around us in the

world today, “ he argues. “And I don’t believe that Christians can just take it and sanctify it and call it holy”, he says to those who say it can be used to reach people for God. “I think it’s a mistake.” It’s like serving a nice juicy steak on a garbage can lid (even if you try to scrub it, it remains a dirty garbage can lid), he explains. “I can sit and talk to anybody about why I think rock music is the wrong musical language to tie with ‘praise the holy God’,” he contends. “They’re incompatible. You see the results of it everywhere with the tension and church splits and even the younger generation.” He adds, “I meet a lot of people today that are questioning because they’ve gotten burned out on the worldliness, the entertainment, and the ‘no-holds-barred we can do anything we want with music’ and ‘God loves us’. And they just come to a point when they go ‘that ain’t right.’”

In his book Lucarini strikes back at most of the arguments Christians make to defend CCM, including, “Isn’t music amoral?” “Isn’t this just a matter of personal preference and taste?” “Show me where the Bible says rock music is evil.” “Isn’t CCM easier to sing than hymns?” and “Isn’t God using CCM to save and disciple teens?” After his experience with taking teens to CCM concerts, Lucarini believes the harm done (CCM artists, whether or not intentionally, role modeling indecent dress and rebellious images, or stirring improper crushes and lustful interests among fans) far outweighs any benefits. Many Christian leaders argue that music is a secondary issue or a matter of secondary doctrine and lament internal church conflicts over such matters. But Lucarini rejects that argument. “It’s very arrogant for people to declare issues that split and divide Christians as secondary. It’s just an attempt to suppress what’s going on”, he said. “Any issue that scandalizes and offends brothers and sisters in Christ cannot be called secondary. At that point in time it’s primary and must be dealt with.”

Lucarini advises churches not only to get rid of CCM (anything that has a rock beat influence) but also worship bands and leaders.

EXCERPTS FROM “WHY I LEFT THE CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN MUSIC MOVEMENT” BY DAN LUCARINI:

[After describing an experience he and his wife had in observing a powerful storm carry thousands of butterflies across a large lake and deposit them roughly on a sandy shore, the author makes the following application:] “In the 1990s, this movement blew into our church services accompanied by powerful forces, and anyone who got in the way was like the butterfly, swept away by its proponents, wounded during the violent journey, and finally dumped on the beach to perish. Some may never fly again, because their spirits were too tattered and torn by the storm’s forces. Others had their souls weighed down by the immorality, deception and divisiveness that accompanied the CCM storm.” (p. 15)

“I realize I am also challenging a very powerful stronghold in the church. CCM is well entrenched now, perhaps even the favoured music style in the majority of fundamental and evangelical church services. CCM has taken deep root in the lives of many believers, and some will find what they read here very painful because it will tug hard on that root. Some pastors will not like what I have to say because they too have embraced this movement. But I believe that the use of CCM in praise and worship is a man-made phenomenon and should be exposed as such because it lacks a strong biblical foundation and ignores God’s instructions for acceptable worship. Using it for worship has produced wrong attitudes and encouraged carnal lifestyles; both are damaging the unity and effectiveness of Christians. I also believe the real motive for adopting CCM for praise and worship was not, as we were often told, to evangelize those from outside the church, but was rooted in a need to satisfy our own desires for our favourite music.” (p. 18)

“In his effort to create a non-judgmental atmosphere, the pastor promoted a ‘God accepts us as we are’ philosophy, with which CCM seems to go hand in hand. This was a pastor who once accepted tickets to a Doobie Brothers rock concert and defended his choice by claiming that if Jesus were alive today, he would be at this concert because he spent time with sinners. This teaching produced a church that attracted people who wanted God in their lives but did not want to change their lifestyles.” (pp. 28, 29)

“Another strong musical influence in my life at this time was Promise Keepers, the well-known men’s movement based in Colorado. Promise Keeper music uses predominantly rock styles, including classic Seventies-style rock. I attended huge stadium rallies where the Maranatha Men’s Band ministered in music.” (p. 30)

“During our weekly practices, the praise band would often switch into a rock and roll ‘jam session’. As the leader, I could have discouraged this but I chose instead to indulge my own appetite for rock and roll. To put it bluntly, I was having fun! As I look back on this, I see how hard it was to restrain the rock music beast and prevent it from taking over completely.” (p. 31)

“Now I want to summarize the reasons I had to leave the CCM scene. Firstly, I could no longer accept the premises undergirding the CCM philosophy. ... Our key premises were that music is amoral; God accepts all music styles; and no one should judge another’s preference or tastes. As I dug into the Bible to prove them right, instead I saw that they were man-centered, illogical, and misrepresentations of basic biblical principles. ... Secondly, when I saw what the Bible teaches about true worship and what it really means to be in the presence of God, I became sickened at the way my generation so glibly used profane and vulgar music accompanied by vulgar dress to offer up worship and praise to a holy God! And no one involved seemed to notice what we were

doing. Thirdly, to preserve my marriage and to be faithful to God in all things, I needed to separate from the temptations that were ever-present in the CCM setting: the ego gratification and attraction to the female members of the worship team.” (p. 34)

“Discipleship is not a self-esteem journey; growth means change, change always includes loss, and loss is always painful. You cannot keep all your old habits and pleasures. ... The ‘Come as you are, God accepts you where you are at’ doctrine is closely aligned with the tolerance movement that is popular in our secular society. ... Jesus did not accept her [the woman caught in adultery in John 8]--he commanded her to change. ... The honest ‘seeker’ must conclude that this ‘come as you are’ teaching of God’s unconditional acceptance is at best misleading. We cannot come to God just as we are, with our sin unconfessed or ignored or draped all over us, and still expect his acceptance. We cannot drag our favourite worldly music, dress and language into the church, and expect a blessing!” (pp. 38, 39, 40)

“Acceptance doctrine is so pervasive in some fellowships that Christians are no longer allowed to question another Christian’s behaviour or personal preferences. If you confront another in love, you will be accused of judging them. If you dare quote chapter and verse from the Bible, you will be called a Pharisee. If a church has any practices that step on the toes of anyone’s personal preferences, then it is considered to be a legalistic church. ... In this new Church of Acceptance, showing tolerance for worldly affections and behaviours is far more important than exercising biblical discernment. ... In this thoroughly biased atmosphere, it is easy to see why a Traditional is afraid to speak out about music styles.” (pp. 40, 41) [The author uses the terms “Traditionals” and “Contemporaries” to describe Christians committed to traditional or contemporary music.]

“When we brought rock music (and all its musical cousins) into the church service, we invited along with it a spirit of immorality with which that music is unavoidably associated.” (p. 42)

“... I believe this aptly illustrates a major problem with the Contemporary’s notion of worship; that God wants to affirm us through worship, to make us feel good about ourselves with the result that we will have this grand experience of feeling higher and higher. ... worship is not looking up and feeling good, it is bowing down and feeling lowly. ... It is certainly biblical to feel happy in Jesus but I now realize that a good personal feeling is not part of biblical worship. When we try to feel an experience of affirmation from worship, we are not worshipping God. We are worshipping our own egos.” (pp. 56, 57)

“I am now convinced that God will not accept our worship when it is offered with music styles that are also used by pagans for their immoral practices. If I

am wrong, why was he so harsh in judging Israel when they sacrificed to him using the pagan high places and rituals? He is a jealous God. If you grasp this principle alone, it will change for ever the way you lead a worship service. ... The true heart of worship is the heart that bows before God and submits to his Word, no more and no less” (p. 57)

“It is time to expose the hypocrisy of those church leaders who justify CCM by claiming they use it for evangelistic purposes in their seeker services. Nonsense! The truth is, these churches use it in their services for the ‘saints’ as well. One of the major problems with seeker-oriented music is that it must not only ‘sink’ to appeal to man’s fallen nature, but is also bound to stir up the believer’s sinful nature, his ‘flesh’, as Paul called it. At the seeker-sensitive churches we attended, the music was ostensibly designed for the unchurched but that excuse was really just a smoke screen obscuring our real reason for bringing CCM into the service. The bottom line was that we simply wanted to use our music in the church, not what we perceived as our parents’ or grandparents’ music. We have the same self-centered, self-indulgent spirit of the 1960s and 1970s but now it has been given a veneer of Christian dedication.” (pp. 62, 63)

“The self-indulgent spirit entered the church with the baby boomers. The urge to change church music coincided with our rise to church leadership positions in the mid-1980s. The pastors leading the seeker-sensitive movement are baby-boomers. ... The ‘70s boomer group has sometimes been dubbed the ‘Me generation’ and now we are bringing our pervasive ‘Me-ness’ into church leadership and practice. ... This besetting sin of our generation will seep into every aspect of church life and ministry.” (pp. 64, 65)

“... we have become preoccupied with perfecting a music ministry that strokes the ego and fulfils the desires of carnal believers, to the detriment of the more serious disciples in our midst.” (p. 66)

“Rock and roll is a musical style that was created for immoral purposes by immoral men, and has always been used by the world to express its immoral attitudes in song.” (p. 68)

“When you combine the sensual dancing with the immodest dress of the women on the platform [in the praise teams], you place a very large stumbling block in front of the men of the congregation.” (p. 71)

“... I lay the blame of splitting churches over music at the feet of Contemporary leaders who insist on the adoption of their music agenda without regard to the conscience and discernment of others.” (p. 76)

“And more and more often, when it comes to a choice between losing long-time members of our church or our pet music programmes, Contemporaries

decide that people are also expendable.” (p. 76)

“Decades of rock music in our culture have permanently stamped that music style with the dimension of immorality. Changing the lyrics and substituting Christian musicians cannot remove that stigma.” (p. 91)

“Music concepts may be amoral or neutral, but all music styles have a moral dimension because they are so easily and unavoidably associated with some worldly attachment.” (p. 91)

“When someone says, ‘Show me where the Bible says that rock music is evil’, you could reply: ‘Show me where the Bible says that...’:

* ‘...God is pleased you chose the same music style as Madonna, Hootie and the Blowfish, and the Dave Matthews Band.

* ‘...you should vigorously defend the favourite music style of this world.’

* ‘...it’s OK to use the same music style as the sex and drug culture.’

* ‘...God waived that “abstain from all appearance of evil” clause just for you.’” (p. 96)

“We took teens to concerts given by popular CCM artists. These were not the ‘radical’ heavy metal or hip-hop artists, but the middle-of-the-road performers who seemed to be good role models. But we noticed that the artists, probably under the influence of their recording companies, imitated secular artists in music, concert performance techniques, dress, hairstyle and merchandising. Everything seemed to be geared to making money by winning fans. The poor teens were manipulated in the same way as when they were listening to their secular teen idols. They were hooked in the beginning by safe, careful lyrics and moderate music but the artists always progressed to an edgier, rockier and harder music style with a lifestyle and image to match. And the teens followed along. The CCM artists became role models for different kinds of immorality: indecent dress, rebellious images, improper crushes on married men by young girls, lustful interest in sexy females by adolescent males.” (p. 117)

“Traditionals are initially assured by the Contemporaries that the two styles can co-exist peacefully. In reality, what happens over time is a steady slide down the slippery slope, away from all traditional music into the latest, ‘edgiest’ contemporary styles.” (p. 119)

“I found it unbelievable that a pastor who was dead-set against rock music, and preached that he would never allow a drum set in his church, would then allow musicians to sneak the drums and rock music in through the back door of accompaniment tapes.” (p. 120)

“When the drum set finally appeared on the platform, I believe the church

reached the steepest and most dangerous part of the slope. More than any other instrument, a drum set is the key instrument of contemporary music styles.” (p. 121)

“With blended services, we have created two sets of musicians with different skills. Now began the competition for the hearts of the congregation: the battle of the bands, so to speak. ... Contemporary always prevailed over Traditional, because it fed the sinful desire of our flesh. Add to that the veneer of respectability given to CCM by the leadership, and many believers gladly traded the old music for the new. ... the blended service is not a long-term solution ... Rather, it is quite simply a transitional phase to gradually move a church service from all traditional to all contemporary. ... even this separation of services [in those churches that attempt to have two different services, one traditional and one contemporary] will not remain sharp for long. Soon it will blur, and the blurring is almost always towards contemporary shades.” (pp. 122, 123)

(Source: “Why I Left the Contemporary Christian Music Movement: Confessions of a Former Worship Leader” Evangelical Press, 2002, P.O. Box 84, Auburn, MA 01501)

