

I recently received an email from a member of a Southern Gospel quartet who had read my article on Rock music. He presented several good questions, and I would like to add my answers to the statements which I previously made in that article.

He asked:

"Is there redemption and restoration for Amy Grant, Sandi Patti and Michael English?  
What is the rhythmic signature of traditional southern gospel music?  
What is the rhythmic signature of early Christian music [hymns, Psalms and spiritual songs]?  
How do these structures compare to the average hymnal?"

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Here is my response:

You had asked if there was any hope of redemption and restoration available for Amy Grant, Sandi Patti and Michael English, and I do not hesitate to reply in the affirmative. The Bible assures us that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom 5:20), but like the apostle, I would also caution that we must be sure not to use our "liberty for an occasion to the flesh" (Gal 5:13).

You also asked about the rhythmic signature of traditional Southern Gospel music. Southern Gospel is a sub-genre of the Gospel Music genre, and it typically utilizes the same emphasis on the backbeat as rock music. However, the genre lines have become greatly blurred during the past 50 years, and there are many songs which are considered Southern Gospel which are founded on a proper natural rhythm. Thus it is very important for anyone who sings this style to learn how to read music and discern between that which is good and that which is evil. It is important to note that those who sang in the tabernacle of the Lord received training in that service from a skillful musician (1 Chron 15:22).

The psalms, hymns and spiritual songs of the early church were quite different from the Southern Gospel music of today. If you study ancient psalteries and hymnals, you will discover that all of those songs are founded on a natural, godly rhythm. It is also very apparent that they were written by men and women who were highly trained in the realms of both music and poetry. As the son of an English teacher, I am always cognizant of errors in grammar, but I can honestly say that I have no recollection of a single such error in any hymn written before the twentieth century. As the recipient of nearly ten years of musical training, I can also state without reservation that all of those hymns are musically sound. Southern Gospel, on the other hand is filled with errors in both grammar and music.

I have therefore chosen to avoid Southern Gospel as much as possible. Although it is often sung in my church, I find it difficult to be taught and admonished by poor grammar and bad music (Col 3:16). A wise man will, of course, be able to increase in learning under any style of tutelage (Prov 1:5), but I have found that I receive much more edification from those songs which are without distracting errors (Php 4:8).

As for an analysis of the average hymnal, I am afraid that I am unable to provide a satisfactory answer simply because I do not know which hymnal would be considered average. I personally prefer the Living Hymns hymnal by Alfred Smith although I do not care for his occasional attempts to modernize certain songs. (For example, in "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing," he changed the phrase "here I raise mine

Ebenezer” to “here I raise my sign of victory.” I understand his motivation, but I rather enjoy the biblical reference to the vision of Jacob.) I would also recommend the hymnal, Soul Stirring Songs and Hymns. Though only half the size of the Living Hymns hymnal, it is still a great compilation and maintains the original wording of those few that have been changed in Al Smith’s larger volume.

I hope that I have answered your questions satisfactorily. I understand that this may be a sensitive subject for you, and I have tried to be kind in my treatment of it. Please forgive me if I have said anything to offend you as that is certainly not my intent. I trust that you will receive this in the spirit in which it is given.