

Should Catholics listen to *Secular Music?*

I have recently been asked about whether a Catholic should be listening to secular music, given all the negative messages it contains. Publicity stunts such as the infamous kiss between Madonna and Britney Spears, continue to trouble many Catholics who might listen to secular music, but who are nevertheless disturbed by the lyrics or the behavior or the artists. I am obviously a strong believer in Christian and Catholic contemporary music, so some may wonder whether I listen to secular music or avoid it altogether.



My listening time is approximately split 70-30 between spiritual and secular music. I listen to secular music for three main reasons. First, I need to be aware of what the popular styles of the moment are. As an artist and music reviewer, I have to know where the current boundary of pop culture is, if I am ever to have any hope of pushing that boundary. As a parent, I need to know what my kids are being exposed to. Obviously, artists such as Eminem get virtually none of my listening time. However, some Catholic artists have tended to shelter themselves from secular influences. The result is that their music is mired about 20 years behind the times. Second, there is some excellent music being made in the secular scene. Lyrics from songs such as "Where's the Love?" from the Black Eyed Peas and "Bring me to Life" by Evanescence still have a positive quality that is to be commended. Third, I also listen to secular music because many Christian artists have now crossed over and are influencing the direction of popular culture. It seems like every year, artists such as Switchfoot, POD, Amy Grant, Stacie Orrico, Sixpence None the Richer and Kirk Franklin

are breaking through on the radio airwaves all over the world. One of the more amazing breakthroughs has been the song "I Can Only Imagine" by Mercy Me. Whereas most past crossover songs have had lyrics that can be interpreted in many different ways, there is no doubt where this album is coming from with the lyrics "Surrounded by Your glory, what will my heart feel. Will I dance for you Jesus, or in awe of You be still? Will I stand in Your presence, or to my knees will I fall. Will I sing hallelujah, will I be able to speak at all? I can only imagine." To hear this song on secular radio is simply amazing. Obviously, there are enough Christians listening in create a demand for this song. If all the believers went away, there would never be this kind of light in the media darkness. I pray the day will come when we will also hear Catholic artists breaking through in this way. When that happens, we need a multitude of Catholics to support these artists.



I still strongly believe that Catholics must show great discernment. When I am asked how much secular music I listen to, it is as if the questioner wants to know what specific percentage would be an acceptable limit for every Catholic. What I have chosen is not a general rule. Everyone has their own limits as to what they would deem acceptable. Just as in the current Harry Potter debate, whereas some feel it is just a decently written children's fantasy and others feel it is a satanic influence on our children, it is important that each of us discern what we want to feed our minds with. No matter what ratio you decide to settle down at, it is important that each individual discern what influences each needs to draw closer to God. The exact ratio you settle on is not as critical as taking the time to reflect on the question.. †

