The Lord Jehovah Reigns

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

The Lord Jehovah reigns,
his throne is built on high;
the garments he assumes
are light and majesty:
his glories shine with beams so bright
no mortal eye can bear the sight.

The thunders of his hand
keep the wide world in awe;
his wrath and justice stand
to guard his holy law;
and where his love resolves to bless
his truth confirms and seals his grace.

Through all his ancient works
amazing wisdom shines,
confounds the powers of hell
and breaks their cursed designs;
strong is his arm, and shall fulfil
his great decrees, his sovereign will.

And can this mighty King
of Glory condescend?
And will he write his name
My Father and my Friend?
I love his name, I love his word;
join, all my powers, and praise the Lord.

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ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

The Seventies: Part Two

Kevin T. Bauder

Perhaps the greatest problem that American evangelicals—including fundamentalists—faced during the 1970s was the development of a new youth counterculture. Of course, countercultures had existed in the past, but the one that started to appear during the mid-1960s was unique in that it became wedded to a generation. Most baby-boomers adopted at least some of the emphases of the counterculture.

A few of those emphases were positive. One was environmentalism: the counterculture co-opted a nascent but growing reaction against rampant pollution. Another was a strong emphasis on racial equality. This emphasis, however, really came from the older Civil Rights Movement and was widely shared within mainstream culture. By the mid-1960s, civil rights had become an establishment issue.

The counterculture was anything but establishment; indeed, its leaders positioned and prided themselves on being anti-establishment, with the word *establishment* understood (at least initially) to include anyone over 30 years old. Probably the core value of the counterculture was an angry commitment to anti-authoritarianism. The counterculture was not simply anti-authority, it was defiant in the face of any authority.

This defiance of authority displayed itself across a range of issues. People involved in the counterculture were anti-police and anti-military. Their protests against the war in Viet Nam became a near-daily occurrence. Many within the counterculture pushed back against laws that restricted drug use, especially the use of hallucinogens (LSD was made illegal in 1966). Much of the counterculture rejected traditional sexual mores in favor of sexual promiscuity or "free love." In other words, the counterculture was not merely "counter," but transgressive—and deliberately so.

The counterculture adopted multiple symbols to display its transgressive ideals. These included the peace symbol (printed) and the peace sign (made with two fingers), both miniskirts and maxiskirts for women, long hair and beards for men, bell-bottomed pants, peasant shirts, wire-rimmed glasses, and love beads for both sexes. The counterculture retooled the English language for its own use, eventually bequeathing expressions such as *turn on*

and *freak out* to future generations. The greatest single symbol of the counterculture, however, was its music.

This generation had a new musical idiom at its disposal, one that was already transgressive. That idiom was Rock and Roll. Of course, Rock was older than the counterculture. Buddy Holly had cracked open a door for Rock and Roll, and Elvis Presley pushed it open a bit further. But the doors of Rock and Roll were blown wide open when the Beatles and the Rolling Stones reached the United States in 1964. Rock was the ideal medium for communicating anger, sexual abandon, hallucinogenic ecstasy, and above all defiance. If the music of the Beatles now seems tame after half a century, it is only because the culture as a whole has plunged even more deeply into the transgressive values that they communicated. These values were communicated with increasing bluntness: nobody really believed in 1963 that the Beatles only wanted to hold your hand, but by their "White Album" in 1968 they were making it clear that they really wanted to "do it in the road."

At the time, most evangelicals were overwhelmingly politically and socially conservative, and the counterculture shocked them. They were stunned by its fury, coarseness, defiance, and arrogance. They instantly reacted against it, sometimes condemning it in harsh terms. Many churches and schools adopted regulations, whether officially or not, to prevent their students from displaying symbols of the counterculture.

What they overlooked, however, was that the counterculture was the relational air that teenagers were breathing. It had its effect even in the most conservative churches. Girls' hemlines began to creep up as boys' hairlines crept down. Bellbottoms (or the slightly less radical flares) were worn everywhere. For perhaps the first time, teenagers were told that, if they were going to be good Christians, they had to look different from their peers.

Some of the most severe reaction in the evangelical world was against Rock and Roll music. In about 1970 I was taken to hear Frank Garlock deliver an hour-long lecture condemning Rock music. Bob Larson, a converted Rock musician, began to build a ministry preaching and writing against the music. Evangelical panic over Rock was inflamed when bands like the Rolling Stones and Black Sabbath began to incorporate Satanic elements into their performances.

Meanwhile, American commercialism was co-opting the counterculture and turning it into a marketing phenomenon. As some of the sillier expressions of the counterculture dropped away, others became mainstream. Even the leaders of fundamentalist colleges were showing on chapel platforms wearing suits with flared pants. The result was not so much that the counterculture died out as that it was simply absorbed.

That was true of the music as well. What was radical in the mid-1960s had become mainstream by 1970, and even some evangelicals were quick to understand the marketing implications (American evangelicalism—including fundamentalism—is nothing if not a marketing phenomenon). Through the late 1960s Ralph Carmichael and Kurt Kaiser were messing around with the new musical idiom, eventually hashing out a musical called *Tell It Like It Is*. Carmichael's song, *He's Everything to Me*, dramatically shifted Christian youth music away from Singspiration-style choruses like *Christ for Me* and *Safe Am I*, or the timeless *Teenager, Are You Lonely?*

The problem with the Carmichael and Kaiser stuff was that it was schmaltzy and soft. They were two old guys (Carmichael in his 40s and Kaiser in his 30s) playing with the sound. In 1972, however, Larry Norman released the album, *Only Visiting This Planet*, including the protest song, *Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music*. The album was a masterstroke. It was loud and angry, but it turned the transgressiveness of the counterculture back on itself. Norman's lyrics mocked drug use and illicit sexuality and even the *Beatles*. But all the defiance was still there, all the distrust of authority, all the resentment toward traditional social norms. The album also featured the song *I Wish We'd All Been Ready*, which may have been the first blockbuster evangelical hit. The song had also been included on Norman's earlier album, *Upon This Rock*, and it became the theme of Mark IV Production's 1972 Rapture movie, *A Thief in the Night*.

A defining moment arrived with Explo 72, a huge evangelism conference and Christian music festival held at the Cotton Bowl and on open land under what is now the Woodall Rodgers Freeway in Dallas. Larry Norman appeared, as did secular stars like Kris Kristofferson and Johnny Cash. The event organizers explicitly sought cooperation from non-evangelical groups like the Seventh Day Adventists. The event became a watershed when even some previously-fundamentalist organizations like Dallas Seminary chose to participate.

By the middle of the 1970s a large percentage of the evangelical world had begun to adopt the symbols and music of the counterculture. Some figures (for example, Oregon Senator Mark Hatfield) also adopted its political and social commitments. Most fundamentalists were still holding out, accepting only the most attenuated versions of countercultural dress and behavior. In the end, however, nobody escaped unscathed. The confrontation with the counterculture changed everyone.

This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
