

Jesus Rocks My Soul

**Contemporary Christian Music and
the Evangelical Consumer**

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1. Introduction to Contemporary Christian Music

“I don’t know but I’ve been told,” the leader of the conga line yelled as the fifty-odd teenagers wove their way through the crowd. “I don’t know but I’ve been told,” the line repeated. Then the leader: “Jesus rocks my soul.” Hundreds of onlookers clapped along absentmindedly, as if they’d seen this scene played out many times before. While everyone waited for KJ-52 – a thirty-four-year old white rapper from Florida – to come onstage, encouraging a group of enthusiastic teenagers seemed as good way to pass the time as any.

Such scenes are common at Soulfest. An annual music festival, Soulfest has brought New England Christian rock fans together every summer for eleven years to enjoy four days of what the festival bills as “music, love, action.” Even though they live far from traditional evangelical strongholds in the South or Midwest, 11,000 people make the trek each year to Gunstock Ski Resort in Gilford, NH over a love of Christian music, Christian values, and Christian community.

Attendance numbers like those are the norm in the world of Christian music. Known more formally as Contemporary Christian Music (CCM), Christian rock has exploded since its inception in the late 1960s. In 2006, American consumers spent over \$700 million on Christian recordings, more than they spent on jazz and classical music combined.¹ While sales of just about every other genre have plummeted since the arrival of the mp3, CCM sales continue to rise by ten percent a year.² If you include concert

¹ Andrew Beaujon. Body Piercing Saved My Life : Inside the Phenomenon of Christian Rock. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2006, p. 9.

²Ibid.

tickets and merchandise sales into your calculations, Christian music is a billion dollar industry.³ Though it has not yet shaken its stigma in the broader culture as a watered-down knock-off of secular music (a stigma derived from years of being just that) these days CCM is as professionally produced and financially viable as anything one might find on the Billboard charts. In fact, it often *is* what's on the Billboard charts.

As CCM sales increased over the last thirty years, scholars took notice. Most existing literature has focused on the production side of the music: the industry and the artists. Authors have worked to discover how this music is created and what mechanisms have helped an amorphous genre achieve such popularity. Sociologists, historians and journalists have studied the industry and the artists to determine how they have transformed CCM from a fly-by-night operation of idealistic but naïve evangelicals to a billion-dollar industry of professionals and trendsetters. These studies provide an important beginning to understanding the genre, but ignore the other side of the equation: the consumers. It has been assumed that these listeners are just generic evangelicals, products of a wider culture of which CCM is just one facet, but is this enough? Who are these people who spend so much time and money on CCM? What does the music mean to listeners, and how does it relate to other aspects of their religious life?

I investigated these questions at Soulfest 2008. From my booth in the vendors tent I handed out eight-hundred surveys to ascertain respondents' cultural and religious backgrounds and the role CCM played in their lives. The surveys were given anonymously, but with space for the respondent to volunteer their email address for a second survey. Several months later, I used these addresses to send follow-up questions

³Daniel Radosh. Rapture Ready! : Adventures in the Parallel Universe of Christian Pop Culture. New York: Scribner, 2008, p. 153.

concerning issues that were raised in the initial survey. To this I got two hundred responses. I compiled the data for each question on both surveys, which I present in chapter two. In chapter three I cross-analyze my findings to consider how different demographic groups think about CCM. I found provocative differences among respondents when categorized by politics, religious denomination, age and gender and I endeavor to make sense of these using the history of CCM and patterns in evangelical culture.

To provide context for my findings, I first need to provide some background on Christian music and evangelicalism at large. As a musical genre defined by lyric and not sound CCM is an unusual phenomena, but not one that emerged in isolation. In its short history the goals of those who produce CCM have shifted from proselytizing to the unsaved to encouraging current believers, in certain ways following trends seen in evangelical culture generally. Various tensions have surrounded the music since its inception with the “Jesus freaks,” and those tensions help explain my data.

A Brief Note on Terminology

After several decades, the terminology scholars and industry insiders use to study popular Christian music remains frustratingly convoluted. The Christian music industry itself calls this genre Contemporary Christian Music (CCM). The premier industry magazine even bears “CCM” as its title, though in 2007 it redefined the acronym’s source for its own purposes as “Christ, Community, Music.” In recent years independent artists have begun to use the term to denigrate the music coming out of the big CCM record labels in Nashville, but most consumers still think of “CCM” as an umbrella term for

anything one might hear at a Christian music festival. Following the precedent set by previous authors, I will use it to mean that as well.

Consumers, however, are more likely to use the familiar term “Christian rock.” Interestingly, what they mean by “Christian rock” may not actually be what we think of as rock music at all. Fans label all sorts of popular Christian music “Christian rock,” be it hip-hop, adult contemporary, or metal. For many fans this term is more familiar than CCM, so at the festival itself I often used it in questions and interactions to avoid confusion. Though both “CCM” and “Christian rock” can be potentially misleading, I use both terms only in their broadest sense to refer to the same general phenomenon.

History of CCM

Beginnings

Music has long been a part of Christian worship, but the genre we know of as Christian rock began in the late ‘60s during the “Jesus People” movement. During 1968, with the Summer of Love come and gone, several southern California churches began proselytizing to the disillusioned hippies littering the beaches. The most prominent outreach church was Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, where pastor Chuck Smith roamed the sands and back streets preaching the word of God to the flower children. Though he said these “long-haired, bearded dirty kids” initially “repulsed” him, Smith put forth all his efforts towards bringing them into the church, turning his own house into a hippie pad for these new Christians to convene or reside.⁴ Disaffected with the sex and drug culture they had been involved with, many embraced the message and were welcomed into area

⁴ Randall Balmer. *Mine Eyes have seen the Glory : A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 19.

churches. In just a few short years Smith's church grew from twenty-five members to over three thousand.⁵ Nationwide, the media dubbed these newly churched hippies the "Jesus People." The influx of the Jesus People initially caused an uproar in some of the more traditional churches, but in the following decade their culture merged with evangelicalism. Some scholars have even called this the Fourth Great Awakening.

Upon entering the church these ex-hippies faced tension between their old values and their new beliefs. They left their sex and drug lifestyles behind (though not completely – one group celebrated their baptism by getting high⁶), but other elements of the hippie ethos remained: their clothing, their hair, and their music. Traditional Christian hymns held little sway for a generation who had come of age with rock and psychedelia. As music journalist Andrew Beaujon puts it in *Body Piercing Saved My Life*, "How could you expect 'em to love Pat Boone after they'd heard *Led Zeppelin II*?"⁷ Instead, a few of the recent converts began experimenting with putting Christian lyrics to familiar rock rhythms. Though debate continues over who should be considered the first true Christian rock artist, a long-haired hippie named Larry Norman quickly took center stage of the movement, earning the title the "Father of Christian Rock." A 1968 album with his group People sold reasonably well, but also precipitated CCM's first controversy; without his knowledge Capitol Records had changed the title from *We Need a Whole Lot More of Jesus and a Whole Lot Less of Rock and Roll* to *I Love You*. Norman quit the group in protest, quickly coming back with his solo hit "I Wish We'd All Been Ready." Ready for Jesus' second coming that is, since the tune featured lyrics

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Mark Allan Powell. *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Music*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002.

⁷ Beaujon, p. 20.

like “There’s no time to change your mind / The Son has come and you’ve been left behind.” Norman continued having Christian hits for the next decade, inspiring the now-familiar term “Jesus freak.”⁸

If Norman led the charge, others were not far behind. A slew of groups sprung up from the ranks of the converted, singing songs of salvation over electric guitars and drums. Not surprisingly, the ex-hippies of Chuck Smith’s Chapel led several of these early groups. One called Children of the Day first hinted at the sales potential of this new genre by clearing 500,000 copies of their 1971 debut.⁹ Christian theologian Mark Allan Powell says the album gave a burgeoning group of artists a sound to rally behind, becoming “a national phenomenon” in the process.¹⁰ Though these numbers are impressive, early CCM albums were almost all sold through Christian outlets, undercutting the music’s stated purpose of turning people from the Age of Aquarius to the Second Coming. As we will see, this tension between the Christian bookstore and mainstream aspirations continued long past Children of the Day.

Though few non-evangelicals heard these groups, the music exploded among believers. Love Song, another group from Calvary Chapel, built on Children of the Day’s success, becoming the most popular of these early groups. As Powell writes, “If Christian music charts had been kept in 1972, the Top 10 songs for the year would have included Children of the Day’s ‘For Those Tears I Died,’ Norman’s ‘I Wish We’d All Been Ready,’ and eight songs by Love Song.”¹¹ Love Song culminated their successful year by playing for 250,000 people at what Billy Graham called the “religious

⁸ Radosh, p. 155.

⁹ Beaujon, p. 23.

¹⁰ Powell, p. 164.

¹¹ Powell, p. 543.

Woodstock,” Explo ’72. Featuring a mix of CCM artists and sympathetic secular-market artists like Johnny Cash, Explo reflected an inclusive brand of CCM that waned in the following decade. Regardless, Explo’s success set the precedent for the litany of CCM festivals we see today.

Members of the church who had scorned the hippie converts proved slow to embrace the new music. Already not thrilled by the sudden influx of unwashed druggies into the church, many associated the sound of rock and roll with the “permissive attitude toward sex, drugs and revolution” displayed in the mass media.¹² A deacon at one early CCM concert became so outraged that attendees were breaking church code by dancing that he shut off the power and literally chased the band out of the building.¹³ Alarmed by the quick rise of CCM sales among young Christians, pastors from coast to coast condemned it as the devil’s music, publishing dozens of books with titles like *Religious Rock’n’Roll: A Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing*. However, they proved unable to hold back the tide of Christian music and soon admitted defeat in the face of inevitability. The drastic decrease in their numbers provides as strong an indication as any of CCM’s growing acceptance in the established evangelical community.

Sales Explosion

As the 1970s progressed, the ranks of the recently converted widened to include secular hitmakers like Barry McGuire (“Eve of Destruction”) and B.J. Thomas (“Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head”). These artists were paraded before audiences in the hope that they would inspire their fans to convert. However, though church leaders

¹² Jay R. Howard and John M. Streck. *Apostles of Rock : The Splintered World of Contemporary Christian Music*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999, p. 28.

¹³ Beaujon, p. 31.

now accepted Christian music for its proselytizing potential, the burgeoning CCM industry was finding that potential difficult to realize. Religious historian William Romanowski writes that an evangelistic view of music-making “proved inadequate for gospel artists to thrive in the mainstream business, where evangelical songs with redundant lyrics about ‘Jesus’ were not only unappealing to secular listeners, but perceived by producers and programmers as potentially offensive to large audience segments.”¹⁴ The primary market for CCM continued to be Christian booksellers.

Though records could perform well there, there was little chance of converting anyone if mainstream retailers refused to stock the albums and mainstream radio ignored them.

Though secular stores were reluctant to carry religious music, secular record labels immediately saw profit potential and began buying or starting Christian labels. Soon everyone from ABC to MCA had their own CCM label. Though most established Christian communities accepted CCM by now, seeing secular companies producing Christian records renewed their unease. Cries of “sell out” rang from pulpits and pews as CCM fans felt betrayed by favorite acts “going commercial.” Consumers were concerned that a secular company would force artists to water down their Christian lyrics, but just the opposite happened. Having witnessed the sales potential of the evangelical market, the labels encouraged artists to make their lyrics as overtly Christian as possible. This trend among non-Christian labels continues today; one band recently sued Warner Brothers Records for promoting them *too* heavily as a Christian act, hurting their chances for secular success.¹⁵

¹⁴ William Romanowski. "Evangelicals and Popular Music: The Contemporary Christian Music Industry." Religion and popular culture in America (2000), p. 106.

¹⁵ Shirley R. Steinberg and Joe L. Kincheloe. Christotainment : Selling Jesus through Popular Culture. Boulder: Westview Press, 2009, p. 230.

However, many of the hyped Christian acts of the 1970s were glad to follow the labels' lead, believing that the message contained in the lyrics was all that mattered. The music itself was self-consciously derivative of secular trends and labels began pushing the "safe" equivalents of currently popular bands. Whitecross was the Christian Aerosmith, DeGarmo & Key the Christian Hall & Oates.¹⁶ Since the whole point of the music was to preach the gospel, musical originality was discouraged. The influx of Jesus People having subsided by the end of the '70s, artists and labels began marketing CCM as a genre of "family-friendly" artists. Even the physical appearance of the typical CCM act changed. Beaujon writes that by the end of the decade "the face of Christian music was no longer a hairy ex-hippie with a thatch on his face and a song in his heart. It was a woman with gigantic hair and way too much makeup or a man who looked as countercultural as Johnny Unitas."¹⁷ However, despite strong promotion by secular labels, CCM failed in the general market. Consumers wondered why they should listen to the knock-off when they could have the real thing.¹⁸ This failure necessitated a change of mission among artists and record executives. The music shouldn't try to convert new followers, they decided, but instead should encourage the old. By the end of the 1970s CCM had found its place as a genre "by and for young evangelicals."¹⁹

For a while these young evangelicals proved enough to sustain a flourishing industry. Bands like Stryper brought hair metal to Christian music, going multiplatinum with in-your-face albums like *Soldiers Under Command* and *To Hell With the Devil*. By

¹⁶ Radosh, p. 156.

¹⁷ Beaujon, p. 29.

¹⁸ Romanowski, p. 114.

¹⁹ Ibid.

1983 “gospel music” sold more than both jazz and classical.²⁰ However, as the ‘80s continued, growth of CCM reached a plateau. Scholars and critics have proposed various theories for this, none altogether persuasive. Some cite the sex and finance scandals of prominent preachers like Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart tainting anything or anyone associated with evangelicalism. Just as conservative Christians were beginning to make their mark in the broader culture, they argue, the most prominent faces of evangelicalism found themselves objects of public disgrace. Beaujon says the scandals left “black marks on [evangelicals’] reputation...across the board—musicians included.”²¹

Christian music endured its own scandals. CCM pioneer Marsha Stevens, singer of Children of the Day, earned the ire of fans by divorcing her husband and, as if that wasn’t controversial enough, coming out as a lesbian. Rumors of affairs continued from prominent CCM artists like Sandy Patti and Michael English.²² Though no exact numbers exist to determine how many fans were lost, a genre that marketed itself as the moral alternative to secular music couldn’t come out of such trials untainted.

During this same time, evangelicals began growing tired of CCM producing “clean” copies of secular songs. There was a limit on how well bands that just ripped off Top 40 sounds could sell, and CCM reached that limit during the ‘80s. A 1983 study by the National Religious Broadcasters found that CCM programming accounted for only 1.6 percent of the listening audience.²³ Until CCM artists concentrated on producing original *music* instead of just lyrics, exposure and sales could only go so far. It wasn’t

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Beaujon, p. 37.

²² John Stiles. "Contemporary Christian Music: Public Relations Amid Scandal." Journal of Religion and Popular Culture 11.

²³ Romanowski, p. 114.

until the arrival of one pretty singer from Georgia that CCM again enjoyed growth and exposure.

Cross-Over Revival

Of the many big names that have come and gone in CCM, Amy Grant tops even Larry Norman as a pivotal figure in the music's history. Rising in prominence in the CCM community throughout the '80s, it was her 1991 album *Heart in Motion* that propelled her to superstar status in secular culture. Cracking the Billboard Top Ten and selling five million copies, *Heart in Motion* challenged the conventional wisdom "by and for young evangelicals" by proving that CCM artists could indeed reach a mainstream audience. The album's single "Baby, Baby" reached number one on the Billboard charts, inspiring *CCM Magazine* to declare this "the most significant single event in the history of contemporary Christian music."²⁴

As would often happen with subsequent artists, many evangelical fans saw Grant's crossover success as a betrayal. The issue revolved around the religious content of the lyrics, or lack thereof. Derogatorily dubbed "positive pop," *Heart in Motion* contained few direct references to God or Jesus. To Christian followers, the pattern seemed clear: the more successful Grant got, the vaguer her lyrics became. One listener complained, "[this] isn't Christian music; it's moral and ethical humanism with a very slight religious perspective."²⁵ Marketing herself as a safe alternative to pop radio, Grant's family-friendly ambiguity drew the ire of legions of evangelical Christians who felt she had sold herself out by abandoning biblical specificity. Longstanding tensions

²⁴ Romanowski, p. 116.

²⁵ Romanowski, p. 115.

boiled over when evangelicals saw Amy Grant enjoying the mainstream success that groups with more explicitly religious lyrics had failed to achieve. A well-known story in CCM lore concerns a concert where a fan presented Grant a flower bouquet, attached to which was a note that read, “Turn back. You can still be saved if you renounce what you’ve done.”²⁶

Sales figures speak louder than critics, however, and Christian labels began scouring their ranks to find the next Amy Grant. Though none of the inevitable slew of sound-alikes achieved the same sales, Grant’s success paved the way for other artists to cross over (or sell out, depending on who you asked) to the mainstream charts. In 1995 rap-rock trio dc Talk sold 1.6 million copies of their album *Jesus Freak*, achieving a Top 40 hit with the ballad “Just Between You and Me,” the least overtly religious song on the record. As Christian bands continued to achieve mainstream success, the dispute within the church raged over artists self-consciously toning down the religious references in their lyrics. The issue came to a head in 1999 when CCM favorites Sixpence None the Richer had a massive hit with “Kiss Me,” a saccharine song celebrating the innocent pleasures of love with nary a religious reference. One of the biggest songs to ever come from a CCM artist, the Christian music community could not decide how to deal with it. After much debate, the powers that be decided to exclude it from consideration for the Dove Awards (the Christian Grammys) where it was understood to be a top contender. To justify the slight, the Gospel Music Association, a promotional branch of the CCM industry, produced for the first time an official definition of Christian music.

Gospel music is music in any style whose lyric is substantially based upon historically orthodox Christian truth contained in or derived from the Holy Bible;

²⁶ Ibid.

and/or an expression of worship of God or praise for His works; and/or testimony of relationship with God through Christ; and/or obviously prompted and informed by a Christian world view.

This definition was met with harsh criticism from all sides. It excludes any sort of instrumental music and seems to have little to do with the traditional big-choir sounds many associate with “gospel music.” Moreover, it raises more questions than it answers, such as “What is ‘historically orthodox’?” or “What is the ‘Christian world view’?” This definition has since been revised and eventually abandoned as the debate continues over what constitutes “Christian music.” Judging from sales figures though, CCM as defined by the agency that monitors records sales currently enjoys an all-time high in sales and mass appeal. Thanks to increased visibility from crossover hitmakers, Americans spend more than \$700 million on Christian albums each year, numbers almost double what they were ten years ago (making it one of the few genres of music not struggling for sales). Notably, 64% of these sales occurred through mainstream retail outlets; labels are no longer constricted by the Christian bookstore.²⁷ Even the old stigma of CCM songs as lesser copies of secular hits is beginning to wane; in 1997 *Rolling Stone* reviewed thirty Christian rock tracks and decided they were “no more insipid or derivative than thirty songs randomly selected from the *Billboard* Hot 100.” Crossover artists continue to abound, with currently well-known names like Switchfoot and Sufjan Stevens having shed their CCM roots for a wider audience. Though many of the old industry tensions remain, the genre has come into its own as a financially viable means of promoting Christian artists.

²⁷ Radosh, p. 153.

Survey of Prior CCM Scholarship

Observational Sociology

The most prominent category of CCM scholarship is that of observational sociology. Quite a few authors from both the academic and journalistic fields have written accounts of their experiences observing the world of CCM, often with the implied question that plagues the sociology of evangelicalism in general: Why are these people so strange? However, the authors generally conclude that CCM fans are more like secular music fans than they anticipated and that the music is no better or worse than its non-Christian counterpart. This literature makes for interesting if anecdotal narratives and, whether the author comes from the world of journalism or academia, is usually written for a popular audience.

The premier book in this genre, and the most widely-distributed on CCM generally, is Andrew Beaujon's *Body Piercing Saved My Life: Inside the Phenomenon of Christian Rock* from 2006. A writer for *Spin* music magazine, Beaujon gives a basic overview of the genre, featuring a broad look at the community and interviews with artists old and new. He gives few statistics or hard facts, instead describing his experiences roaming around places like a record label office in Seattle, the Gospel Music Awards in Nashville, and an alternative Christian music festival in Illinois.

A briefer but perhaps more widely-read discourse on the world of CCM is provided by noted religious historian Randall Balmer in his landmark book *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey Into the Evangelical Subculture in America*.²⁸ In one chapter of this "travelogue"²⁹ he attends a concert by Christian band Jars of Clay (who

²⁸ We will discuss this text in more detail in the section on evangelical history.

²⁹ Balmer, *Mine Eyes*, p. 5.

were at Soulfest) and later talks to them while attending the Gospel Music Association's annual convention. A quasi-crossover act, Jars of Clay present an artist's eye view of the insular world of CCM. Balmer's discourse inevitably turns to the volatility surrounding artists courting the mainstream and while he presents the same themes we've seen before, his analysis of a musician's perspective on the dilemma proves worthwhile.

A recurring theme in Balmer's text concerns evangelical consumerism. Anyone naïve enough to believe the Christian subculture was marked solely by cooperation and generosity would be shocked by Balmer's trip to the Christian Booksellers Association annual trade show, at which over five thousand different Bibles were being promoted. "Bibles are big business," Balmer keeps repeating, but so too is the Christian film industry Balmer explores, and Christian music as we already know. Balmer passes no judgment, but these anecdotes serve as a lesson in the degree of financial sophistication the Christian subculture had achieved by the late '80s. Just as the stereotype of Christian music as watered down, low-quality versions of mainstream music is no longer true, neither is the stigma that Christian culture is a pale imitation of the "real thing."

More recently comes Daniel Radosh's *Rapture Ready!: Adventures in the Parallel Universe of Christian Pop Culture*. As the title implies, this is a book about many facets of Christian consumerism, of which CCM is only one. In addition, he discusses such phenomena as Christian rave culture, the Bibleman superhero, and the rivalry among Bible translators. Like Beaujon's book, these are anecdotal accounts written for the popular reader. However, they clearly situate CCM within a parallel universe of Christian consumerism, where for every worldly cultural activity evangelicals have derived a Christian counterpart. Also like Beaujon, Radosh visits the Cornerstone music

festival and comes away with the same impression: the music is better than expected and the fans look like your average teenager. Together, these three accounts give the reader a sense of the people and places in the world of CCM, and begin to give a context for my statistics.

Sources on the Artists

A wide body of work also exists about the musicians themselves. There are of course plenty of fan publications and websites, most notably the industry trade *CCM Magazine*, and it can be difficult to separate out the truly valuable sources from those that simply function as promotional tools. The most rigorous authors are Jay R. Howard and John M. Streck, who have written *Apostles of Rock: The Splintered World of Contemporary Christian Music* as well as numerous articles summarizing their arguments. Their framework for dissecting Christian music proves a useful tool when thinking about different artists' lyrical approaches to expressing their faith.

The first category of artists they describe are "separational." These are the groups that consciously try to mimic the sounds of popular music while changing the lyrics to be pro-Jesus. As Howard and Streck point out, this actually causes the music to be one step *behind* the cutting edge, giving it the aura of the silly and unoriginal among non-fans. These artists see CCM as a soldier in the Christian war against popular culture, the songs' sole value being as a means to an end: saving the heathen masses. This leads to lyrical homogeneity, since every song expresses the same simple message about Christianity: God Good, Devil Bad (an actual song title). Howard and Streck argue that "Separational artists present a clear and simple answer – Jesus Christ – but fail to recognize the

questions. ‘We have to communicate the basic truths,’ states one artist. ‘We don’t have a lot of time, at a concert or high school assembly, to be subtle.’”³⁰

“Integrational” artists, however, see the secular market not as a means but an end. These artists aggressively court the mainstream, toning down their lyrics to a general feel-good philosophy, a Christian perspective on everyday life. They present their “positive pop” as a wholesome alternative to the mainstream, something worried parents can give to their kids that sounds like what’s popular. Whether they achieve the success they seek varies (Amy Grant is a success story of this type), but they invariably face a backlash from the CCM community for “selling out,” particularly if they were formerly in the separational camp. Some try to play in both leagues, but others hide or outright denounce their Christian roots in an attempt at the mainstream. As Switchfoot told *Rolling Stone* in 2003, “We’re Christians by faith, not genre.”³¹ Needless to say, evangelicals often take issue with this attitude.

The final category of CCM artist, and the one which Howard and Streck claim produces the most interesting music, is the “transformational.” These artists do not see themselves as ministers. Instead of giving the answers separational groups provide, they focus on the questions, the doubts, the trials of being a Christian. They challenge the church as often as they challenge society, pondering the struggle to live as a Christian in the modern age. Though Christian music began moving more in this direction during the ‘90s, these groups still sell poorly in the CCM world. The CCM industry wants songs with clear answers and markets bands that provide those, Howard and Streck argue, not bands that highlight the uncertainties of Christian life. Together, Howard and Streck’s

³⁰ Howard and Streck, p. 44.

³¹ Kirk Miller. “Switchfoot: How God, surfing and Bono inspired this San Diego band.” [Rolling Stone](http://www.rollingstone.com/artists/switchfoot/articles/story/5933531/switchfoot). Sep 24, 2003. <http://www.rollingstone.com/artists/switchfoot/articles/story/5933531/switchfoot>

three categories provide a useful lens through which we can look at the CCM consumer, thinking about whether these artist groupings apply to fans as well.

A more genre-specific look at CCM artists comes in historian Eileen Luhr's *Witnessing Suburbia: Conservatives and Christian Youth Culture*. Luhr devotes a full chapter to the Christian heavy metal of the '80s, talking in depth about the aforementioned Stryper and their confrontational style of spreading the gospel. She includes an amusing story of one group storming a Mötley Crüe concert in 1987 in full body armor, erecting a fourteen-foot tall cross in the middle of the crowd.³² Luhr's analysis shows musicians focused on CCM's original mission of saving lost souls, using means as ostentatious as necessary. Lyrics here tended to be quite violent, artists frequently singing about storming the gates of hell, battling literal demons, fighting with armies of bloodthirsty angels, etc. If Amy Grant represents one end of the spectrum of lyrical ambiguity on matters of faith, these metal groups represent the other.

Sources on the Industry

Tied in with the work on artists is the scholarship on the CCM industry. The most noteworthy author here is religious historian William Romanowski. In various articles he gives a historical overview of CCM record labels, describing their start as fly-by-night operations and growing until many were purchased by secular conglomerates (igniting a backlash from fans). He describes how labels tried to have it both ways, pushing artists both towards the evangelical market and towards the larger secular audience, and how the music became caught in the tussle. Though he offers few opinions, Romanowski

³² Eileen Luhr. *Witnessing Suburbia : Conservatives and Christian Youth Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009, p. 111.

provides plenty of statistics and a good historical overview of the people behind the scenes in CCM.

Florida State graduate Shaun Horton provides a second look at the CCM industry in his unpublished senior thesis, “Redemptive Media: The Professionalization of the Contemporary Christian Music Industry.” He claims that the constant tension between courting the evangelical market and courting the secular has defined the industry, pushing it to become more creative in its marketing and promotion. He argues that the progression of the CCM industry away from dependence on the church is a secularization narrative and calls the industry as profit-driven as any other.

In *Christotainment: Selling Jesus Through Popular Culture*, a collection released this year, communications professor Silvia Giagnoni probes the CCM industry’s reaction to crossover artists even further, detailing the array of Christian labels bought and sold by secular conglomerates and the constant clashes between faith and profit. She explores the various business models under which CCM labels operate, detailing how many albums are promoted by both a Christian label and secular label simultaneously to reach both audiences. Sometimes, she notes, the albums even have different track lists for the two groups. The detail she goes into about specific albums and record labels may not be relevant here, but her article is an important source for learning more about the inner economic workings of a booming industry.

The Consumers

With so much written on the production end of CCM, should more not be said about the consumption? Who listens to this music, and why? An argument could be

made that this question is addressed elsewhere. If evangelical Christians are the primary consumers of CCM (and we will see that they are), why not just look at the many studies of evangelicals generally? Why narrow things to CCM?

The answer is that these people are united (and divided) by more than just what church they go to or how they vote. The commitment Soulfest requires in time and money indicates that attendees find this music truly meaningful. Little has been done to see how fans approach the music, how they incorporate it into their religious beliefs, into their worship rituals, and into their daily lives. By providing a case study, this thesis serves to add data to these questions, pointing the way towards why CCM is such a driving force in music today. Through survey responses, consumers expressed their opinions on what the music meant to them, how the music helped them in their faith, and whether they listened for spiritual or aesthetic reasons. We will see an incredible diversity of opinion among the fan base, showing similar divisions to those Howard and Streck proposed over the true purpose of this genre.

A Brief History of American Evangelicalism

To put CCM in its proper context, a brief overview of evangelical history is needed, with a focus on points where it parallels or precipitates similar movements in CCM. Unlike CCM, evangelicalism is a topic that has been given extensive study in the disciplines of both sociology and history, so what follows is only the most cursory summary of the broad historical outlines that led up to what we know today as evangelicalism, fundamentalism, conservative Christianity, or the religious right.

Modern evangelicalism can perhaps be traced all the way back to the Second Great Awakening in the beginning of the 19th century. During this period of religious revival a conversion-centered Christianity gained thousands of adherents and spread its message across the new America. Christians proved themselves champions for social causes, abolition of slavery chief among them. Though the social reforms in question are very different now, we can see the roots of the modern conservative Christian lobby in these early American Christians' calls for change.

The Civil War only strengthened the fundamentalist movement, according to religious sociologist Nancy Ammerman, when the "rural, homogeneous, Protestant character of American life" began to change with urbanization and industrialization.³³ As religion transitioned into the private sphere, fundamentalist Christians felt called to combat society's so-called secularization, rising in visibility and influence into the twentieth century. Their ascension to the national stage culminated in the Scopes Trial of 1925. As evangelicals fought the teaching of evolution in schools, they gained a new level of national prominence that quickly turned into national notoriety. Lambasted by the media as foolish and out of touch with modernity during the course of the dispute, fundamentalists retreated following the trial, wanting nothing more to do with a society that ridiculed them. They created their own parallel spheres of culture (of which CCM could be seen as an example) in an attempt to steer clear of "the world." They would remain isolated in these spheres for decades, content with the knowledge that they would shortly be saved from sinful society.

³³ Nancy Ammerman, Bible Believers : Fundamentalists in the Modern World. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987, p. 18.

Evangelicals slowly began emerging from their self-imposed exile after World War II. In *God in the White House: How Faith Shaped the Presidency from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush*, Randall Balmer provides a narrative of the successive political events that saw conservative Christians reemerge. The first was Kennedy's presidential campaign. Many American Protestants voiced concern about the idea of a Catholic leading the nation, the theory being that he would be in the pocket of the Vatican. Southern Baptist preacher Billy Graham led the charge of accusations, which came to such a head during the course of the campaign that one of Kennedy's advisors called the religion issue "the key to the election."³⁴ The narrow margin of Kennedy's eventual victory over Richard Nixon bolstered conservative Christian hopes that they could wield powerful influence in America.

These inroads into politics continued slowly throughout the 1960s and early '70s during the administrations of Lyndon Johnson, Nixon, and Gerald Ford, accompanying the beginnings of CCM. However, it wasn't until the mid-70s that evangelical Christianity finally burst back into the fore of political influence. As understood by many, including contemporary evangelicals themselves, the catalyst for the change was 1973's landmark case of *Roe v. Wade*. Authors like Balmer and Susan Harding declare this to be myth, however plausible it may seem in retrospect. The truth is, Balmer notes, that at the time few conservative Christians paid much attention to the case. Those that did tended to *support* it. The Southern Baptist Convention, a group about as conservative as they come, even passed a resolution stating their desire to "work for legislation that will allow the possibility of abortion" in 1971, reaffirming that position in '74 and '76.

³⁴ Randall Balmer. *God in the White House : A History : How Faith Shaped the Presidency from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush*. New York: HarperOne, 2008, p. 24.

Though revisionist history claims that abortion was the rallying point for evangelicals to reassert themselves in popular political culture, the truth is that only later did individuals like Jerry Falwell bring this cause to the fore.

It was in fact a different, less-remembered Supreme Court decision that provided the rallying cry for conservative Christians. On the face of it, 1971's *Green v. Connally* seems quite unobjectionable, declaring that institutions that practiced racial discrimination could no longer declare tax-exempt status. Coming seventeen years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, this decision would seem to be a non-issue. And it would have been, except for one school targeted by the Internal Revenue Service: Bob Jones University. Though racially integrated, BJU forbade interracial dating and discouraged single African-Americans from attending. When BJU sued the government to retain its tax-exempt status, Balmer writes, conservative Christians saw a rallying point around "defending the integrity of evangelical institutions against governmental interference."³⁵ Led by conservative activist Paul Weyrich, *Bob Jones University v. United States* became the touchstone issue for conservative Christians trying to protect their beliefs from outside interference. They displayed their new power during the 1980 election, coming out en masse to vote against Jimmy Carter, who they blamed for the *Green* decision (though he was not yet in office at the time). They helped give Ronald Reagan a landslide victory, securing their place as a powerful force in the political culture.

Though the 1980s saw evangelicals reach a whole new level of influence in government and beyond, the decade also saw events that threatened the very foundations of their public image. The televangelist scandals mentioned earlier dominated the news

³⁵ Balmer, *God*, p. 97.

media, coloring Americans' perceptions of evangelicals. Historian Susan Friend Harding discusses this threat in *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* describing how prominent preachers and evangelical figureheads Oral Roberts, Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart were all caught committing various sexual or financial indiscretions. The fallout was public and unrelenting. Unlike after the 1925 Scopes trial though during the televangelist scandals at the end of the '80s the political coalition did not retreat. "In fact," Harding writes, "the movement had the opposite symbolic effect. Instead of marking the exile, or reexile, of conservative Protestants from public life, it marked their installation, or reinstallation, as routine participants in the culture and political life of the nation."³⁶ Seeing the empires of Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker crumble proved to be the final sign for conservative Christians that "secular modernity" was a delusion; they needed to be involved in every aspect of steering the country back to its "moral Christian" foundations.³⁷

Methodology of Sociological Research

This thesis is primarily a work of in-the-field sociology, and as such I must discuss the methodology I used to shape my attitudes and practices. As my work was survey-based and thus involved only informal interactions with the consumers themselves, the following theories influenced me primarily during the later tasks of data analysis and writing. Figuring out how to objectively put this unusual world into perspective for the reader was a challenge, but I learned that objectivity was only part of the goal.

³⁶ Susan Friend Harding. *The Book of Jerry Falwell : Fundamentalist Language and Politics*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 249.

³⁷ Ibid.

Trends in Thinking about Objectivity

Sociological research has long been assumed to have objectivity as its ideal. Though a researcher acknowledges that he or she comes in with biases, preconceived notions, and a personal history, these should be suppressed as much as possible to create an impartial account of the topic at hand. This is an especially pertinent issue in religious scholarship, as religion is so fundamental to many people's way of thinking that trying to be "objective" about it presents a challenge. If an American is researching American evangelicalism, for instance, he or she would most certainly have some prior relationship with the phenomenon, positive or negative, that would come with him or her into the research. How do you ignore your own personal history?

Some scholars are arguing, you don't. In *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory*, Balmer writes that "no historian worthy of the name can claim utter objectivity."³⁸ Renowned religious sociologist Thomas Tweed agrees, characterizing the fine line between objectivity and autobiography in the introduction to his Cuban-American research *Our Lady of the Exile*. He talks about how his experience interviewing at the Our Lady of Charity shrine in Miami for five years shaped him, so much so that at one point he prayed for Cuban independence even though he neither believes in the power of prayer nor subscribes to the political position in question. "Had I 'gone native,' at least for that one moment," he wonders, "identifying with a political viewpoint that I did not share? Was it simply an act of respect and empathy for those who had been so kind to me and told me

³⁸ Balmer, *Mine Eyes*, p. 6.

so many sad stories? Readers might have more clues than I. In any case, I had to let go of any notion of myself as an unengaged and immutable observer.”³⁹

Perhaps most relevant for my project is the work of Robert Orsi in southern Chicago. He too talked to people at a Catholic shrine, this one dedicated to St. Jude, the patron saint of hopeless causes. People shared their deepest desires and regrets with him, and he dutifully taped it all until at one point a woman asked him, “Have *you* ever prayed to Saint Jude?”⁴⁰ Until then he had been trying to ignore his own complicated Catholic background, but this query brought it to the table. Though he had never prayed to Saint Jude specifically, he writes, growing up he had prayed to plenty of other saints. When he told the woman he had not, she responded “Then how to you expect to understand what we’re doing when we pray to Saint Jude?”

Relevance for This Paper

The real value of the new scholarship is not so much about objectivity generally as it is personal history specifically: what to do when one’s subject of study hits close to home. Tweed, Orsi and Balmer all were raised in the traditions they study, and to some degree their history continues to influence their present opinions and scholarship. This was part of the reason Orsi struggled so much to answer, “Have *you* ever prayed to Saint Jude?”

For the purposes of my thesis, I have prayed to Saint Jude. I find myself in a similar place as Orsi, with a personal history connected to my topic of study, but a history

³⁹ Thomas A. Tweed. "Our Lady of the exile diasporic religion at a Cuban Catholic shrine in Miami." Oxford University Press. 1997, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Robert A. Orsi. Between Heaven and Earth : The Religious Worlds People make and the Scholars Who Study them. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 148.

some years removed. He phrases this position, “I was not *in* enough to contribute to the ongoing life of the tradition, share its consolations, or experience the power of its account of the world, but not *out* enough to assent to [a] colleague’s sharp dismissal [of the tradition].”⁴¹ He goes on to quote Pentecostal historian Grant Wacker as saying, “I suspect that the posture of being half in and half out, though awkward, defines the fate of many religious historians.”

Like Orsi, like Wacker, I am half in and half out. Though far from a part of evangelical culture, as a mainline Protestant I listened to Christian music quite a bit in early high school. Coming into the thesis I saw this personal history as a potential inhibitor to my research, an academic conflict of interest, but this new sociological theory says it needn’t be. If Balmer, Tweed, and Orsi are to be believed, one cannot help but put one’s own self into the work. Tweed cautions, of course, that “letting go of notions of an unengaged and immutable observer [does not] mean that ethnographies are, or ought to be, nothing more than autobiographies, although they are that too.”⁴² One treads a fine line in how to treat one’s personal history, but it a line I will have to walk given my own background. During my weekend at Soulfest, towards the end one young man asked me his own Saint Jude question: “Are *you* born again?” I stumbled around for an answer about objectivity in my research and nondisclosure – by his definition I was probably not born again, and I wanted to avoid an on-the-spot conversion attempt – but though I tried to withhold my history from him, I should not try to withhold it from myself or my research. My thesis will not be an autobiography by any means, but nor will it be a solely “objective” account of the phenomenon. It can’t be.

⁴¹ Orsi, p. 150-1.

⁴² Tweed, p. 9.

With that caveat in mind, we can now turn to the data I collected. As we go I will endeavor to put it into its proper context, trying to be thorough but succinct. With eight hundred responses I cannot go into the nuances of individual opinions, but merely present the larger trends I found while wading through these. We begin with an overview of my findings.

2. Findings: A Basic Look

With hundreds of surveys, the easiest way to begin examining the data is to take each question individually. Below are the figures for responses, with tables included as needed. Though the phrasing of some of the questions may seem informal for an academic paper, I chose the wording for each carefully in an effort to minimize confusion and misunderstanding from respondents. For that reason too, I avoided using the term “Contemporary Christian Music” in questions, instead using the vaguer but more familiar terms “Christian music” and “Christian rock.”

Many of the following questions from the first survey were open-ended, inviting respondents to write as much or as little as they saw fit. Though each question solicited a wide range of responses, I grouped answers based on certain themes that emerged. Responses for open-ended questions could be placed into multiple groupings, so percentages in these cases will not always add up to one hundred. For instance, a respondent could say that CCM strengthened his beliefs *and* increased his focus. All the questions on the second survey were closed, meaning that respondents simply selected from a list of choices. However, once again on several questions they could select multiple choices, for example saying they listened to CCM at church *and* at home. The two surveys in their original form can be viewed the appendix.

First Survey

Age (in years)

| 0-9 | 10-14 | 15-19 | 20-24 | 25-29 | 30-34 | 35-39 | 40-44 | 45-49 |
|-------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 0.7% (5) | 19.7% (152) | 36.7% (284) | 9.7% (75) | 6.5% (50) | 3.0% (23) | 4.0% (31) | 4.3% (33) | 8.3% (64) |

| 50-54 | 55-59 | 60+ |
|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| 5.2% (40) | 1.3% (10) | 0.8% (6) |

A festival attendee wouldn't need to look at this data to realize the dominant group at Soulfest is high school students, many coming in large church youth groups. More notable here is the increase in numbers between 45 and 54 years old. Though the numbers are not large enough for us to completely discount this as mere statistical anomaly, this older group likely consists of parents of these high schoolers and the leaders of the youth groups.

Gender

| Male | Female |
|----------------|----------------|
| 41.6% (321) | 58.4% (451) |

Women's attendance in higher numbers is easily explained as a phenomenon not unique to Soulfest, CCM, or even Christianity itself. Religious scholarship has for decades noted higher female participation in all Western religions, if not all world

religions.⁴³ Many theories have been proposed to explain this curious pattern, from a Freudian approach that states that God as a father figure naturally appeals more to women⁴⁴ to socialization explanations that infer that women are raised with higher expectations that they will be religious than men.⁴⁵ One currently popular view follows from Pascal’s wager saying it is riskier to *not* believe in God and be wrong than to believe in him and be wrong.⁴⁶ Theologian Rodney Stark writes that “Irreligiousness resembles criminal and other risky behaviors in that many religions postulate serious consequences for irreligiousness, and hence just as a burglar risks jail, an atheist risks hell.”⁴⁷ A believer, on the other hand, risks nothing if he is wrong. Studies, including Starks’ own, have shown that men are more prone to such risk-taking behavior than women, and thus more likely to be irreligious. However, this theory assumes that, like other crimes, belief is a choice that one can make where one option is riskier than the other. Some scholars argue that true belief is not a choice at all,⁴⁸ leaving the question of why religion tends to attract women unresolved.

Home State

| MA | NH | ME | CT | VT | NY | NB | RI | PE | FL | NS |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 26.5% (203) | 22.5% (173) | 16.9% (130) | 9.9% (76) | 9.1% (70) | 6.1% (47) | 3.3% (25) | 2.9% (22) | 0.8% (6) | 0.7% (5) | 0.5% (4) |

⁴³ There is some debate as to how widespread this phenomenon is, whether it is truly universal or merely relegated to Western religions. Few dispute that women dominate Christianity however. See Loewenthal, et. al for more.

⁴⁴ Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi and Michael Argyle. The Psychology of Religious Behaviour, Belief, and Experience. London; New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 146.

⁴⁵ Rodney Stark. What Americans really Believe : New Findings from the Baylor Surveys of Religion. Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2008, p. 65.

⁴⁶ Stark, p. 66.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Nancy Frankenberry. Class discussion. Religion 80: Richard Dawkins and His Critics, Fall 2008.

These figures indicate a combination of distance from the festival and population. For instance, while the festival is located in New Hampshire, the population of Massachusetts is six times greater, allowing it to pull slightly ahead. In this table I omitted states from which only one attendee came, as such anomalies are potentially interesting but statistically irrelevant.

Home Environment

| City | Suburban | Rural | Other |
|----------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------|
| 19.1% (145) | 37.2% (283) | 41.5% (316) | 2.2% (17) |

For a festival located in a generally rural area, these statistics are not surprising. Many factors play into these results, from financial affluence to evangelical density, but these are not relevant to Soulfest or this paper. These data are only important when one compares the answers people from these areas gave to the CCM questions as we will do later.

Political Views

| Very Liberal | Somewhat Liberal | Moderate | Somewhat Conservative | Very Conservative | Other |
|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| 3.3% (21) | 10.4% (67) | 26.2% (169) | 29.5% (190) | 21.9% (141) | 8.7% (56) |

These statistics only reinforce the political conservatism of white evangelical Christians. While this area is certainly not the Bible belt – all eight states represented above list went for Obama in November – over half of Soulfest’s patrons self-identify as conservative. Again, I will discuss this in more detail in chapter three.

Ethnicity

| Caucasian | African-American | Latino/a | Asian-American | Other |
|------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| 90.7% (674) | 1.9% (14) | 3.4% (25) | 1.8% (13) | 2.3% (17) |

One look at a Soulfest crowd would confirm these numbers, persons of color hard to spot in the sea of white. Even the three mainstage rappers were white. Religious sociologist Milmon Harrison writes that racial homogeneity has been a concern for some in the CCM industry since the '90s, describing Christian retailers' perceived discrimination in not promoting black CCM artists in the same way they do white artists.⁴⁹ During my weekend at Soulfest, I was surprised myself to see no instances of black gospel performance. Though CCM is often sold in the "Gospel" music section at mainstream retailers, the worlds of CCM and gospel remain divided along strongly racial lines.

Denomination

| None | Baptist | Pentecostal | Catholic | Methodist | Nazarene |
|----------------|----------------|--------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 28.7% (176) | 22.6% (139) | 13.5% (83) | 9.1% (56) | 3.4% (21) | 3.3% (20) |

| Congregational | Lutheran | Episcopal | Anglican | Missionary Alliance | Presbyterian |
|-----------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| 2.8% (17) | 2.8% (17) | 2.6% (16) | 1.6% (10) | 1.6% (10) | 1.5% (9) |

In a chapter titled "Predicting the End of Denominationalism," Baptist theologian Rodney Stark writes that "during the 1950s it became the received wisdom that

⁴⁹ M.F. Harrison. "ERACE-Ing the Color Line: Racial Reconciliation in the Christian Music Industry." *Journal of Media and Religion*. 4.1 (2005), p. 35.

denominationalism was no longer a significant factor among American Protestants.”⁵⁰ He describes how a popular writer wrote that America had achieved a “common religion” of only three groups: Protestants, Catholics and Jews. Historian John Turner examines the first of these groups in *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ*, describing how “parachurch” organizations like Campus Crusade operating outside the traditional boundaries of denomination became the de facto leaders of the evangelical movement. He writes,

The impetus for cultural adaptation and innovative evangelistic techniques has come from nondenominational megachurches and parachurch agencies. Since parachurch organizations are normally dependent upon only their donors and the charismatic leadership of their founders, they alter their policies and strategies more quickly than denominations, which typically have thicker layers of decision making and bureaucracy. Because they cross denominational lines and transcend individual megachurches,, parachurch organizations shape much of modern evangelism’s character and public agenda.⁵¹

Parachurch organizations have played a large role in moving evangelicalism away from denominational allegiances and towards divisions along political and cultural lines. Thus it is not surprising to find that respondents claiming a nondenominational identity comprise the largest group in this survey. Many of their churches may have roots in certain denominations, roots parishioners may not even be aware of, but at some point broke away from their national organization. Even those that do claim ties to a certain denomination often do so loosely, finding general beliefs and values more important than specific rules and bylaws.

Of those still holding to some semblance of denominational identity, respondents associated themselves with the traditionally evangelical groups of Baptists and

⁵⁰ Stark, p. 3.

⁵¹ John G. Turner. *Bill Bright & Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008, p. 3.

Pentecostals more than any other, followed by Catholics and a smattering of other miscellaneous Christian groups both evangelical and not. Since denominational identity is not as strong as it once was, I used a follow-up question to confirm that ties to evangelical communities and values dominate festival attendees.

How often do you typically attend religious services?

| More than once a week | Once a week | Once or twice a month | Several times a year | Never |
|------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| 38.6% (296) | 50.1% (384) | 6.4% (49) | 4.1% (31) | 0.9% (7) |

What we see here is that about 90% of attendees attend church services once a week or more. These are not casual Christians just here for the music and festival atmosphere. Though one can imagine those believers enjoying the festival as well, the distribution of information is such that an irregular church attendee would be unlikely to find out about Soulfest. As a later chart will show, over half of attendees found out via their church or youth group, with very few finding out through less religiously-directed avenues like the internet.

How often do you typically attend church for reasons other than religious services?

| More than once a week | Once a week | Once or twice a month | Several times a year | Never |
|------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| 32.4% (250) | 36.7% (283) | 14.6% (113) | 10.2% (79) | 6.1% (47) |

Evangelical churches often have an active weeklong schedule of meetings, events, get-togethers, and worship services. People included everything from Bible study to

mission trips in their answers here, but the primary reason to go to church for something other than a worship service was youth groups. Heavy involvement here shows religious enthusiasm, but also helps build social networks crucial to many of the groups coming to Soulfest.

On a scale of 0 to 4, how big of a role does Christian music play in your spiritual life and development?

The commitments Soulfest required from attendees necessitated that most be reasonably invested in the music, or at least be traveling with someone who was. For most attendees getting to Gilford required some work (over three-fourths came from out-of-state) and finances, with a several hundred dollar ticket fee not to mention gas at record prices. Suffice to say that few attendees came on a whim.

For those reasons I made sure to phrase the question in a way unlikely to be misinterpreted as, “How big of a fan are you?” By incorporating spirituality, I sought to discover whether people really associated this music with their religion, or whether they enjoyed it simply for the good tunes. For the majority, their enjoyment of the music proved closely tied to their personal faith. In response, 328 participants (42.6%) marked four, “of great significance,” while only 11 (1.4%) marked zero, “no role.” The results ascended in a straight line from zero to four, for an overall average response of 3.11.

Do an artist’s religious beliefs influence your decision of whether to buy or download their music?

As we have seen, Christian rock started in part as a facet of a “parallel culture,” the idea being that this provide an adequate substitute for the evils of secular music. If one listened to CCM, one needn’t listen to anything else. The results here show

consumers differ in how much they agree with that mentality. Of the four choices given – “not at all,” “a little,” “some” and “a lot” – 33.6% of respondents (358) picked “some.” Though 27.2% (209) circled “a lot,” 16.5% chose “not at all.” These numbers can be better understood when we break them down demographically later on, but it is clear that the “parallel culture” ideology is by no means the dominant school of thought here.

What brings you to this festival?

| Community | Music | Values | Curiosity | Church/ Group | Spiritual Development |
|------------------|----------------|---------------|------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 17.3% (134) | 49.7% (385) | 1.7% (13) | 5.1% (40) | 40.1% (311) | 8.4% (65) |

It should come as no surprise that the most common reason cited for attending a music festival was the music. However, the number of people who cited the group they were with, most often a church youth group or family, exemplifies the social nature of the festival. While at the festival I observed that very few people came with just a friend or two. The smallest typical group would be a three or four person family, but the majority of high school-age attendees came with a large youth group, sometimes roaming the grounds in packs of over a dozen. Perhaps this contributed to the community feel many cited as important, young people connecting at concerts or camp.

Interestingly, very few people mentioned anything religious. In this open-ended question, the first thoughts that came to mind about Soulfest were the music and the people, not the spirituality. Though a look around fields of people with their eyes closed and hands raised for a worship song confirmed that attendees did find the weekend

spiritually valuable, one wonders whether it provided any religious nourishment they could not have received elsewhere.

What does the term “Christian rock” suggest to you?

| Basic Def. | Emotions | Language | Quality | Negative |
|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 63.7% (492) | 6.8% (53) | 12.7% (98) | 17.0% (132) | 3.6% (28) |

It should come as no surprise that the majority of respondents simply recited a definition like “Rock and roll with a Christian message” here, or that many also simply put down words expressing the quality of the music (most typical response of this kind: “Awesome!”). What proves more interesting are the minority who cited other aspects as fundamental to what they think of as “Christian rock.” For almost a hundred responses, as important as the religious content was the simple use of appropriate language. The phrases “clean” and “no swears” came up frequently. On a basic level, many consumers define Christian music strictly by its avoidance of a certain set of words.

One prominent CCM artist who tests this definition is David Bazan, known more often by his stage name Pedro the Lion. In one song he compares committing adultery to the Rapture. In another he sings “Everything is so meaningful, but most everything turns to shit / Rejoice! Rejoice!” Though one imagines the 12.7% who cited language here would have a problem with these lyrics, Bazan’s work is revered by thousands of other CCM fans not only willing to look beyond graphic content, but actually appreciative of a Christian artist who seems more relevant to the world in which they live. David Bazan has never been invited to Soulfest.

Some of the 28 individuals who gave a negative reaction to the term “Christian rock” are just the sort of fans who find Bazan’s music refreshing. Negative responses in fact hit both end of the religious spectrum, some calling it not Christian enough (“Most ‘Christian’ rock isn’t about Jesus, so I don’t consider it Christian” wrote one respondent) to it being so blatantly Christian it proved irrelevant (“cheesy” was a commonly used term here). As we saw with Howard and Streck’s categories of CCM, this debate over “How Christian is “Christian rock’?” is not a new one, and continues to divide fans.

Why do you listen to Christian music?

| Taste | Morality | Inspiration | Message | Exposure | To Please God |
|----------------|-----------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| 32.7% (253) | 12.3% (95) | 43.5% (337) | 25.4% (197) | 2.8% (22) | 1.2% (9) |

Though taste was often cited as a valid if evasive answer here (“I just like it”), CCM’s inspirational qualities were mentioned even more. For those who wrote down inspiration but didn’t mention the specific Christian message of the music, one wonders how much of the inspirational quality cited comes from the lyrics and how much from the rock and roll sounds themselves. Unfortunately I found no similar studies to tell me how inspirational teens find music generally. Given that CCM generally has a more direct message than other genres though, its power to inspire believers seems strong.

Does it matter to you how explicit the religious content is in a Christian artist’s lyrics?

An oft-cited rumor in the world of CCM is that certain Christian radio stations employ a “Jesus count,” where if a song does not say the word Jesus a certain number of

times it is not considered for airplay. Moreover, Howard and Spark note that “albums with the highest ‘Jesus count’ are frequently the biggest sellers in the Christian bookstore distribution system, while those with low counts are equally often viewed with suspicion.”⁵² Here we see the mindset of certain Christian music fans. Among the Soulfest crowd though, this group proved a minority. 47.0% of respondents responded no to this question, while only 29.6% said yes (9.6% said it depends). Moreover, a small percentage of those who said yes clarified that they did so to mean they did not *want* the music to be too explicit. They cited two reasons for this. Some said they preferred not to be “beaten over the head” with a Christian message to which they already agreed, while others harkened back to the origins of CCM, saying that if the songs were too explicitly Christian they would not reach nonbelievers.

Any radio stations or bookstores who do use this “Jesus count” may want to reconsider. The average listener does not want to be preached at. They want to be inspired, whether it comes from a song about a specific biblical passage or one that generally extols positive thinking (or even one about asking out a cute girl).

Do the messages in the music differ from those you get from church or religious leaders?

| Yes: Message | Yes: Intensity or Directness | Yes: Scripture vs. Experience | Yes: Other | No |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| 5.6% (43) | 6.2% (48) | 6.1% (47) | 17.7% (137) | 53.3% (413) |

In including this question on the survey, I worried that every response would be a resounding no and I would have wasted my already limited space. Though a slim

⁵² Howard and Streck, p. 96-7.

majority did indeed claim the messages did not differ, many others saw a disconnect. For most the problem was not that the two sources, church and CCM, were giving them conflicting teachings necessarily (though they were for over 5%), but that the two came at Christianity from different perspectives. Many claimed they could relate to CCM more than they could their church, because the messages of CCM was more direct. Quite a few specifically praised CCM for relating to their own experience, not just waxing lyrical on some passage of scripture like their pastors might. The evangelicals at Soulfest want a Christianity relevant to their daily lives, one that talks about school and crushes and stress and peer pressure, not one that simply extols Bible study. As one respondent wrote, “Some churches say like ‘Jesus Saves,’ but fail to relate to me as an individual, where in music, it often pins itself right to my heart and impacts me personally.” Another got even more specific: “Yes. Church doesn’t hit on thoughts of suicide, drugs, and all of the terror around us.”

Has Christian music influenced your religious beliefs?

| Yes: Inspiration | Yes: Learning | Yes: Saved | Yes: Focus | Yes: Strengthened | Yes: Other | No |
|-------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| 15.0% (116) | 9.4% (73) | 2.5% (19) | 8.1% (63) | 10.1% (78) | 22.7% (176) | 31.1% (241) |

I wonder if any CCM artists would be discouraged to see that almost a third of respondents said “no” to this question. “I believe what I learn in church” was a common explanation. For others, however, the music inspired them, taught them about Christianity or the Bible, or, for a select few, even had a hand in them being saved, i.e. coming to Christianity. As something that can be played in the car, when exercising, or in school, many said the prime utility of Christian music was keeping their mind focused

on God during times it otherwise might not be. Even more said the music strengthened their faith or their relationship with God.

Has Christian music influenced your social/political beliefs?

Evangelical Christianity is tied in the eyes of many to the religious right, but believers do not see CCM that way. Only 29.6% said it had influenced their social or political beliefs, and most of those cited various humanitarian efforts about helping the poor, contributing to charity, or sponsoring a child in the third world through one of several prominent Christian organizations. Answers mentioning politically divisive issues like abortion or gay marriage were rare.

For outsiders conditioned to think of evangelicals as hell-bent (pun intended) on converting America to their political mindset this may seem surprising, but even the briefest listen to CCM songs makes it apparent how little political agenda CCM artists have.⁵³ As we have seen, song topics tend to be as broadly Christian as possible, their vagueness angering certain listeners. Modern CCM artists tone down their lyrics to not offend anyone except perhaps the most strident atheist, and singing about politics is a sure way to do just the opposite. Though rare examples of political sloganeering do exist (one lyric I heard: “Hitler’s still alive in the knives of abortionists”), they are so rare it is difficult to characterize a “typical” political stance for CCM. Though one artist at Soulfest sang about condemning evolutionists in a “love the sinner, hate the sin” sort of way, another had a tune preaching against homophobia and intolerance. One man even

⁵³ Radosh, 160.

said that listening to a CCM song that weekend made him a supporter of universal healthcare!

Second Survey

How long have you been listening to Christian rock?

| Less than 1 year | 1-2 years | 2-3 years | 3-4 years | 4-5 years | 5-6 years |
|-------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 3.7% (9) | 8.2% (20) | 7.4% (18) | 16.0% (39) | Error | 10.7% (26) |

| 6-7 years | 7-8 years | 8-9 years | 9-10 years | More than 10 years | I don't listen to CCM |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| 5.3% (13) | Error | 5.7% (14) | 3.9% (7) | 37% (90) | 3.3% (8) |

Unfortunately due to my oversight on the ten-response limit of the SurveyMonkey.com polls I used for the follow-up survey, two possible choices were eliminated from this question (marked with “Error” above). Though this upsets the results a little, one imagines that respondents just picked the next closest answer. Statistical analysis can still be useful.

The most notable discovery we find is that many people have listened to CCM a long time, perhaps their whole life. Over a third of respondents have been listening for over ten years, and this from a sample pool that is half high school students. Youth discover this music through church, youth group, or parents and, through a lasting relationship with the church, stick with CCM for the long term.

One possible reason people listen to CCM for so long is that it is a genre defined purely by lyrical content. If a fan’s musical tastes move from pop to hard rock to hip-

hop, CCM can travel with them across all these musical styles. As long as a consumer's feelings towards Christianity do not waver, CCM can provide for even the most fluctuating tastes.

How did you find out about this festival?

| Friend/Family | Church/Youth Group | Ad | Radio | Website | Artist(s) |
|----------------------|---------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|------------------|
| 62.6% (137) | 52.5% (115) | 29.7% (65) | 22.4% (49) | 12.3% (27) | 10.0% (22) |

| Organization | Other |
|---------------------|--------------|
| 7.3% (16) | 5.0% 11 |

The prime mode of distribution for information about Soulfest is social networking. The vast majority of attendees learned about the festival from family, friends, church, or a youth group while far fewer saw ads or the website. Perhaps not surprisingly in an area that CCM tours rarely visit, very few learned about the festival through a favorite artist's tour schedule.

We saw that many Soulfest attendees came in large groups, generally youth groups, and these data help explain that phenomena. Though Soulfest generally does not hurt for attendance, it seems its marketing campaign is far less affective than simple word-of-mouth. With a social network method of information distribution, it stands to reason that large groups will make up the majority of visitors as opposed to the individuals or pairs that might come if they learned about it from the website or artist.

How many times have you gone to Soulfest (including 2008)?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | > 5 |
|----------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|------------|---------------|
| 40.8% (100) | 22.7% (56) | 11.0% (27) | 9.4% (23) | 4% (10) | 11.8% (29) |

Surviving longer than many music festivals, Soulfest has operated every summer since 1998. However, though CCM fans on the whole have listened for a long time, many came to Soulfest for the first time last summer. Since there was nothing particularly unusual about Soulfest 2008, we can assume that these numbers would be similar from year to year. As we just saw, most learned about Soulfest through personal connections from friends and family, so perhaps the reason for the lack of repeat attendance comes from weaker evangelical networks than one might find in more heavily Christian areas of the country. Fewer evangelicals in New England presumably means fewer diehard CCM fans, so for many youth group attendees what was fun one year might not be a necessity the next.

Another potential problem is the repeating of big name artists. Contemporary Christian Music only has so many groups famous enough to headline a festival, so the top of the line-up tends to be similar year after year. For instance, of the four headliners announced for Soulfest 2009, three headlined in 2008 as well. Though one finds more diversity farther down the list, many fans might see the same names pop up as the featured performers and think, “But I just saw them *last* year.”

How many other Christian rock festivals have you been to (before Soulfest 2008)?

| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | > 5 |
|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|---------------|
| 61.5% (35) | 15.5% (35) | 8.4% (19) | 7.1% (16) | 0.9% (2) | 0.0% (0) | 6.6% (15) |

In retrospect, this question could have been phrased more clearly to indicate it meant festivals *other than* Soulfest. However, were that the case it would just push the data even more towards the zero end of the spectrum. This may be based on geography more than anything else. The closest other CCM festival to New England is in Pennsylvania, whereas if one lived in southern Illinois one could hit half a dozen festivals within a few hours' drive. These responses are indicative more of the specific location of these respondents than the general passion of CCM fans at large.

Where are you primarily when you listen to Christian rock?

| Alone | Church | With Family | With Friends | Youth Group | Concerts | Other |
|----------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 91.7% (199) | 44.7% (97) | 57.1% (124) | 56.1% (123) | 39.2% (85) | 63.1% (137) | 13.4% 29 |

We know that a primary mode of CCM distribution is family and friends, and it stands to reason that people listen to music alone and at concerts. Given the proportion of attendees who came with a church or high school youth group though, I was initially surprised that number was not higher until I realized the slightly skewed sample these statistics come from. That is, as a follow-up internet survey, those who responded tended to be older than those who took the initial in-person survey (the average age for the latter was 24.6 years old, while the average here was 28.6). With 104 respondents here of middle or high school age (between 10 and 19), the number 85 shows that the vast majority of these teens *are* listening to the music in youth group. The large group of “Other” responses broke down into two categories: in the car and at work.

Where do you get your Christian rock from?

| Christian Bookstores | Mainstream Stores | Purchase Online | Download for Free | Church/Youth Group |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| 56.8% (125) | 40.9% (90) | 62.3% (137) | 21.4% (47) | 18.6% (41) |

| From Friends | Concerts | Don't listen | Other |
|---------------------|-----------------|---------------------|--------------|
| 39.5% (87) | 56.4% (124) | 2.7% (6) | 7.7% 17 |

Though quite a few people still purchase music from Christian bookstores, these numbers reinforce the fact that they are no longer the CCM gatekeeper they once were. As with most genres of music, the internet is the primary mode of distribution these days and most likely aids the social networking of friends' recommendations. Young Christians are just as likely to download music illegally as any other teenager⁵⁴ and with current trends in music retail one wonders what the breakdown will be between purchasing or illegally downloading music in twenty years. Once again, the youth group numbers are deceptively small, and when factoring in age (as we will do more thoroughly below) turn out to be a larger percentage.

If you are eighteen or younger, do your parents listen to this music?

Exactly two-third of respondents here said their parents did in fact listen to CCM. For any reader has memories from childhood of fighting with parents over musical choice, this may seem a surprising number. Personally, I know of very few parents who listen to the indie rock or pop-punk many students on this campus enjoy. However, in

⁵⁴ Radosh, p. 153.

many communities CCM plays a part of worship services or other church activities. The CCM subgenre known as “praise” or “worship” songs has found a home in evangelical churches as a more accessible means of musical worshiping than traditional hymns. In fact, a whole organization exists to deal with licensing rights of CCM songs for use in worship. For a parent who has sung a Steven Curtis Chapman song in church for years, the step to becoming a fan of him as a performer is understandable.

Furthermore, we once again come back to CCM’s unique status as a *lyrical* genre. A father who likes country, a mother who prefers light rock, and two children who listen to punk and metal would all find much to enjoy at Soulfest. Though the more harder-edged shows at Soulfest tended to have young crowds, the softer pop sounds that often become worship hits found many parents singing along.

If you have school-age children, do they listen to this music?

The results here, not surprisingly, are incredibly high. In fact, only one respondent said his children did not listen. This necessitates little explanation, as it seems highly unlikely a parent would come here unaccompanied or be a fan of a stereotypically young genre of music (rock/pop) without his or her child enjoying it too.

3. Looking at the Data Demographically

Now that we've taken a look at the basic statistics we can look at how different groups view CCM. I looked at all the above questions in light of age, gender, race, and a host of other criteria. Only the interesting or potentially significant findings are given below though. Since I did not include a chart showing how, say, CCM's social influence differs by gender, the reader can assume that there was no significant correlation.

The data below fall into two categories of analysis. The first group encompasses patterns we see when grouping respondents by Political View, Denomination and Age. All three of these can be explained looking at the history of "parallel culture" mentality in American evangelicalism. However, grouping respondents by Gender produces unique patterns that demand an explanation all their own.

Political Views: Statistics

On a scale of 0 to 4, how big of a role does Christian music play in your spiritual life and development?

| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Total |
|------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|--------------|
| Very Liberal | 9.5% | 9.5% | 19.1% | 28.6% | 33.3% | 21 |
| Somewhat Liberal | 3.0% | 13.4% | 16.4% | 29.9% | 37.3% | 67 |
| Moderate | 0.6% | 4.7% | 24.9% | 30.8% | 39.1% | 169 |
| Somewhat Conservative | 0.5% | 5.3% | 19.1% | 29.6% | 45.5% | 189 |
| Very Conservative | 1.4% | 2.1% | 11.4% | 26.2% | 58.9% | 141 |
| Total | 8 | 36 | 118 | 197 | 284 | 587 |

We know that the majority of people at the festival are there because they enjoy CCM. The question we're looking at here is on what dimension do people enjoy it. It's important to avoid making claims about one group being "bigger fans" of CCM than the other, but with this question we can look at people's reactions to the spiritual dimensions of the music.

Here we have a case of conservatives rating the spiritual role far higher on the scale than liberals. Over half of the Very Conservative patrons said CCM was extremely important (4) in their spiritual development, while barely a third of liberals did. Looking at the opposite end of the scale, by 0 and 1, you see the opposite pattern. A possible explanation for this and all the data that follows is given in the next section of this paper.

Why do you listen to Christian music?

| | Taste | Morality | Inspiration | Message | Exposure | Please God | Total |
|------------------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Very Liberal | 38.1% | 9.5% | 38.1% | 14.3% | 0% | 0% | 21 |
| Somewhat Liberal | 38.8% | 6.0% | 38.8% | 19.4% | 1.5% | 1.5% | 67 |
| Moderate | 37.9% | 12.4% | 36.7% | 25.4% | 3.6% | 0.5% | 190 |
| Somewhat Conservative | 33.7% | 13.2% | 47.37% | 29.5% | 2.8% | 1.1% | 141 |
| Very Conservative | 20.6% | 15.6% | 51.77% | 30.5% | 1.8% | 2.1% | 56 |
| Total | 210 | 80 | 285 | 172 | 17 | 8 | 588 |

What people think of to respond to this broad question indicates something about their basic usage of the music. Do the Christian lyrics come immediately to mind, or do the fun sounds of rock and roll? Judging from the scores on the Inspiration and Message

categories, the religious message is more fundamental to conservatives than liberals. Liberals are more likely to cite simple taste as the reason, indicating that the music as a whole speaks to them, but not the Christian message specifically.

Do an artist’s religious beliefs influence your decision of whether to buy or download their music?

| | Not at all | A little | Some | A lot | Total |
|------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| Very Liberal | 28.6% | 28.6% | 28.6% | 14.3% | 21 |
| Somewhat Liberal | 28.4% | 23.9% | 29.9% | 17.9% | 27 |
| Moderate | 16.8% | 25.8% | 34.7% | 22.8% | 167 |
| Somewhat Conservative | 12.2% | 25.0% | 38.8% | 23.9% | 188 |
| Very Conservative | 11.4% | 7.1% | 28.4% | 53.2% | 141 |
| Total | 102 | 139 | 213 | 185 | 584 |

Here we see results we might predict from the previous table. Conservatives more deeply invested in the spiritual element of CCM naturally care more about the religious beliefs of the musicians. For many Very Conservative individuals it can even be a deciding element as to whether to listen to a certain artist. Liberals tend to range more in their opinions, though far fewer say it influences them “a lot.”

**Does it matter to you how explicit the religious content is in a
Christian artist's lyrics?**

| | Yes | No | Depends | Total |
|------------------------------|------------|-----------|----------------|--------------|
| Very Liberal | 14.3% | 66.7% | 9.5% | 21 |
| Somewhat Liberal | 20.9% | 65.7% | 2.3% | 67 |
| Moderate | 18.9% | 59.2% | 11.8% | 169 |
| Somewhat Conservative | 31.1% | 46.3% | 12.1% | 190 |
| Very Conservative | 52.5% | 26.2% | 9.2% | 141 |
| Total | 200 | 311 | 65 | 588 |

However, believing the right things is not enough to endear an artist to conservative listeners. The artist must also proclaim those things explicitly in his or her music. While few liberals care whether the Christian content of CCM is blatant or subtle, conservatives pay attention to that distinction. In fact, many wrote in more detail to explain, indicating that this was a topic they felt strongly about. "I've heard more than a few artists whose Christian content is only approximately 60-70% on their albums," one man wrote. "I believe it should be 100%."

How many non-Christian albums do you buy or download in a typical month?

| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5-9 | 10+ | Total |
|------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Very Liberal | 50.0% | 15.0% | 10.0% | 0% | .0% | 0% | 20.0% | 20 |
| Somewhat Liberal | 34.5% | 19.0% | 15.6% | 5.2% | 5.2% | 15.6% | 5.2% | 58 |
| Moderate | 40.4% | 27.3% | 5.6% | 7.5% | 4.4% | 8.7% | 6.2% | 161 |
| Somewhat Conservative | 51.2% | 25.9% | 9.2% | 6.9% | 1.2% | 4.0% | 1.7% | 174 |
| Very Conservative | 65.7% | 21.4% | 3.8% | 1.5% | 0.8% | 3.8% | 3.1% | 131 |
| Total | 287 | 142 | 50 | 31 | 15 | 40 | 28 | 544 |

Once again, the data line up neatly with what we've seen before. A person that cares passionately that an artist be Christian is more likely to avoid non-Christian material than one who does not. Over half of conservatives say they never buy secular albums, while those who marked Somewhat Liberal are far less likely.

The high response of "0" in the Very Liberal category brings up a point worth noting. Though statistics from that group can be useful when looked at in conjunction with the Somewhat Liberal data, with only twenty respondents there simple isn't enough data to make judgments based on it alone. Here we see 50% saying they buy no secular albums, which seems out of sync. However, twenty individuals is not many compared with the over two hundred Somewhat Liberal and Moderate responses, so it is likely just a statistical fluke.

**Do the messages in the music differ from those you get from church
or religious leaders?**

| | Yes: Message | Yes: Directness or Intensity | Yes: Scripture vs. Experience | Yes: Other | No | Total |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|---|--|-----------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Very Liberal | 23.81% | 4.8% | 4.8% | 19.1% | 38.1% | 21 |
| Somewhat Liberal | 7.5% | 6.0% | 7.5% | 17.9% | 49.3% | 67 |
| Moderate | 3.6% | 8.3% | 7.7% | 17.8% | 49.7% | 169 |
| Somewhat Conservative | 4.7% | 7.4% | 5.3% | 15.8% | 59.5% | 190 |
| Very Conservative | 5.0% | 4.3% | 3.6% | 14.2% | 62.1% | 141 |
| Total | 37 | 41 | 37 | 107 | 357 | 588 |

The easiest way to analyze these numbers is not to sum up the various permutations of yes, but simply to look at who said no. For a little over 50% of the population at large, the message did not differ. However, the only two groups anywhere near that 50% mark here are Somewhat Liberal and Moderate. Far more conservatives say the message does not differ for them than do liberals.

Puzzling this out is tricky because it involves a third factor: denomination. A denominational table for this question would look very similar to what we see above. The more traditionally conservative denominations (Baptists and Pentecostals) generally saw no difference in message, whereas the more liberal or mixed groups like the other two did. Trying to argue that one factor is causing a difference of opinion to be seen between the stage and pulpit ignores the fact that these two factors, denomination and political view are tied together. Instead, we can say the messages CCM delivers come

more naturally to conservative evangelicals, whereas more liberal non-evangelicals are likely to have some trouble reconciling them with what they hear in church.

Political View: Analysis

In 1951, theologian H. Richard Niebuhr created a schema describing how Christians deal with wider culture in his landmark book *Christ and Culture*. In his view, five options existed. The first one, and the most important for our purposes, was “Christ against culture.” In this view a believer sees a fundamental disconnect between secular culture and the values of their belief system. Mainstream culture is evil, the work of Satan, and the good Christian should have nothing to do with it. The opposite view is presented in “Christ of culture,” which states that since God made humans and humans create culture, the best of mainstream culture is a manifestation of the divine. Three middle positions – “Christ above culture,” “Christ and culture in paradox,” and “Christ the transformer of culture” – all seek to find a middle ground between these two poles.

In the introduction I discussed how evangelicals’ public embarrassment of the 1925 Scopes trial led them to create a “parallel culture,” but allow me to go into more detail here. Portrayed as “a duel to the death” between Christianity and fundamentalism by prosecuting attorney and biblical literalist William Jennings Bryan, the Scopes trial excited the nation’s imagination, everyone having an opinion on the subject of evolution.⁵⁵ The media covered every aspect of the case, letting Americans feel they had a stake in the outcome.

⁵⁵ Harding, p. 67.

Though Bryan won the case for creationism, he lost what Susan Friend Harding calls “the cultural battle.”⁵⁶ In *The Book of Jerry Falwell*, she provides a familiar narrative of the ridicule “Bible-believing” Christians suffered in the media and the broader imagination. “Especially in the early accounts of the Scopes trial,” she writes, “the word and all persons and things called ‘Fundamentalist’ were riddled with pejorative connotations.”⁵⁷

Mocked and ridiculed by mainstream society, fundamentalist Christians turned inward. They accused mainstream culture, the media in particular, of preaching dangerous and sinful values and vowed to stay removed from it. As historian Randall Balmer puts it, “Evangelicals slumped away from the trial in disgrace and despair, signaling a long retreat into their own subculture of congregations, denominations, Bible camps, Bible institutes, colleges, seminaries, missionary societies, and publishing houses.”⁵⁸ Harding writes that fundamentalist leaders “refrained from ‘overtly’ mixing religion and politics in public venues or events, avoided partisan events, and restricted themselves to private ‘fellowshipping’ activities. In these ways, they collaborated with secular modernity’s presumption that the public arena was off-limits to openly Bible-believing voices.”⁵⁹ This is a clear representation of Niebuhr’s “Christ against culture” model.

Instead of engaging in secular culture, then, for much of the twentieth century conservative Christians created a “parallel” culture safe from the corrupting influences at work in the world. CCM emerged in the context of this mentality. Secular rock and rock

⁵⁶ Harding, p. 63.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Randall Balmer. *Thy Kingdom Come : How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America, an Evangelical's Lament*. New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 2006, p. xvi.

⁵⁹ Balmer, *Kingdom*, p. 77-8.

was seen as evil, so evangelicals co-opted the “Jesus freak” music to create a “safe” equivalent for their own world. For decades following the Scopes trial conservative Christians created a sphere for themselves insulated from the dangers of mainstream culture, creating Christian counterparts to secular phenomena, from Bibleman the superhero to Heritage USA the Christian theme park.

Mainline Christians never abandoned secular society in the same way. Sociologist Nancy Ammerman studied these “lay liberals,” more often referred to as “mainline” Protestants, in a piece titled “Golden Rule Christianity.” Surveying over 1,500 people, she learned that for these non-evangelical Christians the most common characterization of Christian life was living by the Golden Rule. Their vision of Christianity entailed getting out in the world and helping others regardless of their beliefs. “Religiosity is not, for them, utterly ‘private,’” Ammerman writes. “Golden Rule Christians said they participate in church fellowship activities only a few times a year, on average, while they participate in civic and community groups once a month or more. On average, they find only one or two of their five closest friends in their congregation.”⁶⁰ These “lay liberals” do not evidence the “Christ against culture” paradigm of the evangelicals, but rather fit into the “Christ of culture” or even “Christ the transformer of culture” without seeing a conflict between their beliefs and the “mainstream.”

All this helps us to explain the above results. In all the tables given, more liberal viewers evidence the attitude of seeing this as one genre among many, enjoyed for its own sake but not at the exclusion of non-CCM music. They cite simple taste as the

⁶⁰Nancy Ammerman. "Golden Rule Christianity: Lived Religion in the American Mainstream." Lived Religion in America: Towards a History of Practice. Ed. David D. Hall. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, p. 207.

reason they listen to CCM and buy many secular albums as well. They claim an artist's personal beliefs matter little to them and that they do not care how explicit the religious content is in CCM.

Conservative listeners, on the other hand, are more likely to listen to CCM exclusively, avoiding secular artists and albums. They prefer the Christian content in their music to be explicit, and are more likely to take an artist's religion into consideration while choosing who to support. Listening to CCM at the exclusion of anything produced by the "mainstream" suggests a "parallel culture" mindset. In the comments, many conservative disparage secular music, describing it as "bad" or "polluting." They fear that listening to non-Christian music would lead some to profess non-Christian beliefs and attitudes.

The question remains as to why, for instance, 26% of those identifying as Very Conservative *don't* care how explicit the music is. Why do some conservatives buy quite a few non-CCM albums, while some liberals buy none? Perhaps evangelical culture is no longer as marginalized as it once was, leading to an increasing diversity of opinions and values. Looking at the denominational breakdown of response may help shed some light.

Denomination: Statistics

Do an artist's religious beliefs influence your decision of whether to buy or download their music?

| | Not at all | A little | Some | A lot | Total |
|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| Baptist | 15.1% | 21.6% | 36.0% | 27.3% | 139 |
| Pentecostal | 8.4% | 18.1% | 31.3% | 42.2% | 83 |
| Catholic | 25.0% | 30.4% | 26.8% | 17.9% | 56 |
| Methodist | 38.1% | 14.3% | 28.6% | 19.1% | 21 |
| Total | 50 | 65 | 97 | 88 | 299 |

The four denominations above were picked because they had the largest membership numbers, the only four with enough people to make statistical judgments. Luckily, they cross a broad range of attendees, exhibiting both evangelical communities (Baptists and Pentecostals) and the traditionally non-evangelical denominations of Methodists and Catholics. We can use these four to begin to make some claims about how evangelical Christians approach CCM differently than non-evangelicals. Unfortunately the group claiming no denominational identity, reflecting the continuing trends in American Christianity we saw above, must be left aside for now. Though it seems probable that most would claim themselves evangelical and could be looked at next to Baptists and Pentecostals, this is merely a hypothesis, and one unnecessary to make when we have the certain data of those who *did* claim denominational identity.

Evangelicals, particularly Pentecostals, appear to care strongly about an artist's religion. Catholics and Methodists were more likely to say they did not care at all and less likely to say they cared a lot. Many evangelicals claim to take an artist's religious beliefs into serious consideration when deciding whether to consume their product. For non-evangelicals, a musician's religion is less likely to be a decisive factor.

How many non-Christian albums do you buy or download in a typical month?

| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5-9 | 10+ | Total |
|--------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Baptist | 48.8% | 27.6% | 6.5% | 5.7% | 2.4% | 6.5% | 2.4% | 123 |
| Pentecostal | 66.7% | 15.4% | 6.4% | 2.6% | 2.6% | 1.3% | 5.1% | 78 |
| Catholic | 37.7% | 28.3% | 11.3% | 5.7% | 5.7% | 5.7% | 5.7% | 53 |
| Methodist | 40.0% | 25.0% | 5.0% | 5.0% | 10.0% | 10.0% | 5.0% | 20 |
| Total | 140 | 66 | 20 | 13 | 10 | 14 | 11 | 279 |

We saw that an artist’s religion matters far more to evangelicals, and sure enough they buy fewer secular albums than Catholics or Methodists. Once again Pentecostals are the most resistant, a full two-thirds claiming they generally do not buy non-CCM albums at all. Evangelicals clearly are more inclined to listen to CCM and CCM *only*, while non-evangelicals might broaden their palette with non-Christian artists.

Does it matter to you how explicit the religious content is in a Christian artist’s lyrics?

| | Yes | No | Depends | Total |
|--------------------|------------|-----------|----------------|--------------|
| Baptist | 35.3% | 41.7% | 10.8% | 139 |
| Pentecostal | 34.9% | 43.4% | 9.6% | 83 |
| Catholic | 14.3% | 58.9% | 12.5% | 56 |
| Methodist | 19.1% | 61.9% | 4.8% | 21 |
| Total | 178 | 301 | 59 | 299 |

Even narrowing the discussion down to CCM artists, tastes diverge in how Christian the music should be. Well over 50% of Catholics and Methodists say they do not care how explicitly religious CCM songs are, but a good portion of Baptists and

Pentecostals say they care a good deal. We can clearly see two attitudes emerging, one typical of evangelicals that says only explicitly Christian music is worth listening to, and another that says that either non-Christian or vaguely Christian music is acceptable as well.

Where do you get your Christian music from?

| <i>Born again?</i> | Christian Bookstores | Mainstream Stores | Purchase Online | Download for Free | Church/Youth Group | From Friends |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Yes | 62.1% | 40.4% | 60.2% | 19.9% | 16.1% | 35.4% |
| No | 48.6% | 40.5% | 75.7% | 27.0% | 18.9% | 48.6% |
| Total | 118 | 80 | 125 | 42 | 33 | 75 |

| | Concerts | Don't listen | Total |
|--------------|-----------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Yes | 59.6% | 1.2% | 161 |
| No | 49.5% | 5.4% | 37 |
| Total | 113 | 4 | 198 |

Instead of asking about specific denominations, the follow-up survey used the question “Does your church preach about the importance of the ‘born again’ experience?” to indirectly ask the question, “Do you come from an evangelical community?” The importance of a conversion to become “born again” is a defining characteristic of evangelicalism along with a belief in the inerrancy of the Bible. Incidentally, I also asked about the belief in inerrancy as way to double-check the data and received similar numbers as I did to the born again question.

The most notable feature here shows not just evangelicals’ higher likelihood to frequent Christian bookstores, but that they shop at secular stores as well. Though the

Christian bookstore was designed as a more wholesome alternative to regular bookstores, it appears that many evangelicals visit both.

Non-evangelicals, however, are more likely to get their music from the internet. Perhaps this is because anyone not shopping at a Christian bookstore has few options to buy CCM from a retail outlet (mainstream stores carry few CCM CDs) and must turn to the wealth of albums available for purchase or download online. An interesting follow-up question would be whether people are buying CCM from online Christian merchandise retailers, or from secular shopping sites like Amazon.com.

Denomination: Analysis

What emerges from these data are conflicting viewpoints about the tension between Christian and mainstream culture. We can safely say that almost all respondents enjoy CCM, but whether they also listen to non-Christian or vaguely Christian music differs widely. Evangelical respondents were more likely to use an artist's religious background and lyrical content as a litmus test to decide whether to listen while non-evangelicals saw religion as less of a priority in their musical patronage.

In 2007 Baylor University conducted a study that helps explain these phenomena by looking at denominational relationships to secular culture. As theologian Rodney Stark explains it in *What Americans Really Believe*, respondents from a variety of denominations were asked how their church felt about issues from homosexuality and abortion to gambling and wearing revealing clothing. They were asked if their church specifically *forbade* these things, merely *discouraged* them, or had no opinion. The results were compiled into an four-tiered Index of Tension between the denominations

and wider culture. Conservative Protestant denominations hit 53% in the High Tension group all together, with Pentecostals scoring 75% and Baptists 49%. What did Liberal Protestant denominations score in High Tension? 13% (Methodists were 18%). On the other end of the scale, 47% Liberal Protestant denominations were ranked as seeing Low Tension between beliefs and culture. The same was only true for 8% of Conservative Protestant groups.⁶¹

With these statistics my results should come as no surprise. Conservative evangelical denominations like Baptists and Pentecostals are more likely to view CCM through a “parallel culture” lens while more liberal non-evangelicals like Methodists and Catholics are more likely to view CCM as part of a wider not-exclusively-Christian culture. Baptists and Pentecostals care more strongly about an artist’s personal beliefs and more about how Christian CCM lyrics are, while Methodists and Catholics buy more secular albums. Evangelicals purchase more from Christian bookstores to buy CCM, where non-evangelicals tend toward the religion-neutral space of the internet.

The correlations are clear between denomination and political view and given how closely the two have become tied together that is not surprising. Evangelicals, many of whom are politically conservative, are likely to view CCM as an isolated sphere that must be separated from secular culture. Once again, though, we do not know the full story. Half of Baptists buy no secular music albums, as we would expect from the parallel culture analysis, but that means half still do. To explain the cracks in the parallel culture model we need to continue our history of evangelicalism’s changing relationship

⁶¹ Stark, p. 31.

to mainstream culture. The answer lies in the changing modes of evangelical expression over the last thirty years, and can be best explored in the Age section below.

Age: Statistics

How big of a role does Christian music play in your spiritual life and development?

| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Total |
|--------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|--------------|
| 10-14 | 0.7% | 6.5% | 26.5% | 42.6% | 23.9% | 155 |
| 15-19 | 1.1% | 6.0% | 18.7% | 33.6% | 40.6% | 283 |
| 20-24 | 5.3% | 5.3% | 17.3% | 30.7% | 41.3% | 75 |
| 25-29 | 2.0% | 2.0% | 18.0% | 22.0% | 56.0% | 50 |
| 30-34 | 0% | 0% | 17.4% | 4.4% | 78.3% | 23 |
| 35-39 | 3.2% | 3.2% | 9.7% | 38.7% | 45.1% | 31 |
| 40-44 | 3.0% | 6.1% | 9.1% | 45.5% | 36.7% | 33 |
| 45-49 | 0% | 1.6% | 15.6% | 17.2% | 65.6% | 64 |
| 50+ | 0% | 1.9% | 13.0% | 24.1% | 61.1% | 54 |
| Total | 11 | 37 | 143 | 247 | 330 | 768 |

To begin, let’s see how important different age groups find the music spiritually. How much do people actually think of this as *religious* music? Though the data do not present a smooth picture, in general older respondents marked higher on the scale of importance. Going down the “4” column, we see the percentages generally *increase* as the ages approach fifty and beyond. Looking at the 1 and 2 column (the zero has so few responses as to be statistically insignificant), we see the percentages generally *decrease* as respondents get older. For reasons we will examine later, it seems clear that older CCM consumers find the music more spiritually relevant than do younger fans.

How many non-Christian music albums do you buy or download in a typical month?

| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5-9 | 10+ | Total |
|--------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|------------|------------|--------------|
| 10-14 | 42.0% | 23.2% | 10.1% | 9.4% | 1.5% | 5.8% | 8.0% | 138 |
| 15-19 | 31.1% | 29.1% | 10.4% | 7.6% | 5.6% | 9.6% | 6.8% | 251 |
| 20-24 | 45.1% | 21.1% | 12.7% | 9.9% | 2.8% | 5.6% | 2.8% | 71 |
| 25-29 | 60.0% | 17.8% | 13.3% | 2.2% | 0% | 6.7% | 0% | 45 |
| 30-34 | 63.6% | 27.3% | 4.6% | 0% | 0% | 4.6% | 0% | 22 |
| 35-39 | 60.0% | 23.3% | 3.3% | 0% | 0% | 6.7% | 6.7% | 30 |
| 40-44 | 78.8% | 12.1% | 3.0% | 3.0% | 0% | 0% | 3.1% | 33 |
| 45-49 | 83.1% | 10.1% | 1.7% | 0% | 0% | 5.1% | 0% | 59 |
| 50+ | 66.7% | 27.5% | 3.9% | 2.0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 51 |
| Total | 336 | 165 | 61 | 42 | 18 | 45 | 33 | 700 |

The number of CCM album purchases does not differ noticeably by age and so I did not bother including a chart. This just serves to remind us that we are not trying to say which group likes the music more, supports the artists more, or is the “biggest fan.” We are looking to see how groups approach and interact with the music’s spiritual element.

As we know, the only practical difference between CCM songs and non-CCM songs are the lyrics. Here we see that older consumers are far more resistant to secular music than younger consumers. The percentage buying zero albums *increases* with age, while the percentage buying two or more *decreases*. Older consumers possess a mindset that encourages them to listen to Christian music exclusively, whereas younger fans have more diverse consumption habits.

Why do you listen to Christian music?

| | Taste | Morality | Inspiration | Message | Exposure | Please God | Total |
|--------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------|
| 10-14 | 42.0% | 13.4% | 26.1% | 18.5% | 6.4% | 0.6% | 157 |
| 15-19 | 38.0% | 10.9% | 43.3% | 22.5% | 2.5% | 1.1% | 284 |
| 20-24 | 20.0% | 14.7% | 46.7% | 34.7% | 1.3% | 0% | 75 |
| 25-29 | 18.0% | 8.0% | 52.0% | 26.0% | 0% | 0% | 50 |
| 30-34 | 34.8% | 4.4% | 60.9% | 26.1% | 0% | 0% | 23 |
| 35-39 | 22.6% | 22.6% | 32.3% | 32.3% | 9.7% | 3.2% | 31 |
| 40-44 | 33.3% | 18.2% | 54.6% | 33.3% | 3.0% | 0% | 33 |
| 45-49 | 31.3% | 12.5% | 48.4% | 28.1% | 0% | 1.6% | 64 |
| 50+ | 16.1% | 10.7% | 66.1% | 35.7% | 0% | 5.4% | 56 |
| Total | 253 | 95 | 335 | 197 | 22 | 9 | 773 |

Younger people were less likely to cite the two most directly religious answers, the inspirational value of the music and its message (“Please God” has too few responses to be considered) as key reasons for listening. Where 66% of people fifty and above found the music inspirational, only 26% of ten to fifteen-year olds felt the same. Teenagers were far more likely to simply cite simple personal preference as their reason. Now admittedly, part of that may have to do with a teenager’s aversion to being self-reflective, preferring instead to write a taste-based answer like, “It just rocks,” but coupling this with our other results it certainly seems like the religious message of CCM resonates more strongly for older listeners.

Does it matter to you how explicit the religious content is in a Christian artist's lyrics?

| | Yes | No | Depends | Total |
|--------------|------------|-----------|----------------|--------------|
| 10-14 | 19.6% | 47.1% | 4.5% | 157 |
| 15-19 | 27.1% | 50.7% | 12.7% | 284 |
| 20-24 | 32.0% | 44.0% | 8.0% | 75 |
| 25-29 | 34.0% | 50.0% | 10.0% | 50 |
| 30-34 | 30.4% | 52.2% | 13.0% | 23 |
| 35-39 | 19.4% | 54.8% | 16.1% | 31 |
| 40-44 | 27.3% | 48.5% | 12.1% | 33 |
| 45-49 | 43.6% | 37.5% | 4.7% | 64 |
| 50+ | 51.8% | 33.9% | 8.9% | 56 |
| Total | 228 | 364 | 74 | 773 |

These results further support the theory that the religious messages of CCM find a more receptive audience in older consumers. Listeners over forty were far more likely to say they desired explicit Christian messages in CCM than listeners under. An interesting feature here is that as you scroll down the ages you see the youngest saying in large numbers that they do not care, then as you get slightly older you see more people in their thirties saying it depends on a variety of things. As you look at responses from the oldest groups, though, you see a new certainty developing that they *do* care whether the Christianity is explicit.

Age: Analysis

We have seen how our parallel cultures model helps explain the statistics for conservatives and liberals, evangelicals and not, but how does it deal with age? The key here is the more recent history of parallel culture theology. Because while the idea of evangelicals and fundamentalists living their own world avoiding secular society was true

for most of the twentieth century, it has eroded over the last thirty years. As noted in the introductory section on evangelical history, beginning perhaps as early as Catholic John Kennedy's run for the White House but reaching full bloom in the '70s with the initial support and subsequent dismissal evangelicals gave Jimmy Carter, the idea of evangelicals staying away from secular society eroded. That mentality has all but died politically thanks to leaders like Jerry Falwell,. Culturally there are still trappings of this mindset – we have spent the past dozen pages looking at some of them – but it too has begun to fade. “In the world but not of the world” is the current way of thinking, not “Christ against culture.”

This change shows up very clearly in these age data. Older respondents growing up three or four decades ago clearly evidence certain values associated with parallel culture. They avoid secular music and care strongly about how religious CCM songs are. An artist's personal beliefs matter to them, because the music is very likely to influence them spiritually. The same patterns we have seen with political conservatives and evangelicals show up, indicating some expected overlap.

Younger listeners, however, evidence fewer of these opinions. Having grown up post-Reagan, they are very much used to evangelical Christianity engaging with mainstream culture. They have far less issue purchasing non-Christian music, saying music does not play a particularly large role in their spiritual life regardless. They listen to the music, not the message. Taste ranks high on the reasons why they choose to listen to CCM, while less than a quarter of teens care how explicitly religious the messages of their favorite CCM songs are. This changing mindset also influences how we view our data on politics and denomination, seeing now why though different groups lean different

way, the divisions are not set in stone. Changing relations to culture cause a mixture of responses from attendees, and it could be in that twenty years when these youth have grown up results for a survey like this would be quite different.

The point could be argued that young people are simply more liberal, and that causes them to view CCM differently. Or the converse, that the liberals view it differently because of youth. Though there is a slight correlation in my data between youth and political affiliation, it is far more subtle than it might be elsewhere. By and large, young or old, this is a politically conservative crowd. Anyone holding different beliefs has done so by personal choice, not based on age or peer pressure.

We now see why young people respond the way they do to CCM. It's not necessarily that they are less spiritual, they just are more likely to view spirituality in the wider context of their life. They do not bracket off CCM just as they do not bracket off Christianity. CCM is a genre to be enjoyed, but not at the exclusion of other genres. They enjoy the music whether the lyrics are about Jesus or about a girl.

Gender: Statistics

How big of a role does Christian music play in your spiritual life and development?

| | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Total |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|--------------|
| Male | 1.6% | 4.7% | 21.9% | 31.7% | 40.1% | 319 |
| Female | 1.3% | 4.9% | 16.3% | 32.1% | 45.3% | 448 |
| Total | 11 | 37 | 143 | 245 | 331 | 767 |

Here we see the first sign of a difference in the way males and females listen to CCM. The fact that organized religions tend to have more women than men explains the

female majority, but it seems females find more spiritual meaning in CCM than males as well. Five percent more of them give the role it plays a 4 rating, while five percent more males give it a 2 (the lowest rating with triple-digit numbers).

What brings you to Soulfest?

| | Community | Music | Values | Curiosity | Church/Group |
|---------------|------------------|--------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Male | 16.2% | 46.4% | 2.2% | 4.1% | 38.6% |
| Female | 18.0% | 52.3% | 1.3% | 5.8% | 41.0% |
| Total | 133 | 385 | 13 | 39 | 309 |

| | Spiritual Development | Total |
|---------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| Male | 5.3% | 451 |
| Female | 10.6% | 321 |
| Total | 65 | 772 |

Given that women rate about two percent higher in most of these categories, it is safe to say they tend to be more expressive in their answers. Concluding anything about the fact that they cited community slightly more would be misleading. The statistic that does stand out though is their inclination to mention spiritual development as a reason to come to this CCM festival twice as often as men. Viewing this ratio along with women rating CCM higher as a role in their spiritual life, a pattern starts to emerge.

Why do you listen to Christian music?

| | Taste | Values | Inspiration | Message | Exposure |
|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Male | 36.8% | 2.2% | 35.2% | 24.0% | 3.7% |
| Female | 29.5% | 1.3% | 49.5% | 26.4% | 2.2% |
| Total | 251 | 13 | 336 | 196 | 22 |

| | To Please God | Total |
|---------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Male | 1.3% | 321 |
| Female | 1.1% | 451 |
| Total | 9 | 772 |

As we have seen before, the two most significant religious categories here are Inspiration and Message. On both, women score higher (14% higher on Inspiration)! What is the only category that men have a significant advantage? Taste, which as we know is often just an “I like the music” answer without any more spiritual depth. Men, it appears, listen to the music for the sound whereas women are more likely to listen to the music for the message.

Has Christian music influenced your religious beliefs?

| | Yes: Focus | Yes: Inspiration | Yes: Learning | Yes: Strengthened | Yes: Saved |
|---------------|-------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Male | 8.4% | 14.0% | 10.6% | 8.1% | 2.8% |
| Female | 8.0% | 15.5% | 8.7% | 11.5% | 2.2% |
| Total | 63 | 115 | 73 | 78 | 19 |

| | Yes: Other | No | Total |
|---------------|-------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Male | 22.4% | 33.0% | 321 |
| Female | 22.8% | 29.9% | 451 |
| Total | 175 | 241 | 772 |

The final key difference to see how men and women interpret CCM differently is to see whether it influences them religiously. From the data we have already looked at we would expect women to be more influenced than men and this turns out to be the case. Again the key piece of data to look at here is “No,” since from it you can interpret that grand total of all the different “Yes” answers. And of those saying that CCM does not influence their religious beliefs, men score higher. Women score higher on the three Yes answers with the highest numbers – Inspiration, Strengthened Belief, and Other – so we once again see women finding CCM more spiritually fulfilling.

Gender: Analysis

We have seen statistic after statistic that indicates women view CCM as somehow more religious than men do, but what do all these numbers really mean? Do women just like CCM more than men? This seems a hard statement to justify, given that a four-day festival in upstate New Hampshire required as much commitment for men as it did women (and we’ve seen that the higher attendance of women is explained by wider religious patterns). The statistics show that men buy just as many CCM albums as women, and are in fact even more likely to attend Christian music concerts. Clearly gender proves little indication of how big a CCM “fan” one is. Instead, what we find is that women find CCM more inspirational, more meaningful, more spiritual. More men, on the other hand enjoy the music itself but don’t necessarily use it to inspire them religiously.

This difference can be explained from two angles. The first is in the different way men and women see music, and the second is the different men and women view religion.

Previous studies have shown that both music and religion affect men and women differently, so if we look at gender in regards to music about religion, the divide grows even stronger. The documented gender divides help explain the different responses men and women gave to the CCM questions and show why their difference of opinion is unlikely to disappear anytime soon.

Gender and Music

Several sociological studies have been done on the different ways men and women listen to music. A frequently cited study from 1978 provides a model for us to make sense of the gender divide among CCM consumers. While examining music listening habits among suburban high school and college students, Walter Martin Howard Pearson and Seth Schiller discovered a sharp gender divide in the “gratifications” music provided for listeners. These measured gratifications included personal mood control and elevation, feeling less alone, and reflecting on lyrics. Looking at these all together, these authors concluded that “popular music appears to be more functional for adolescent girls, at least in terms of gratifications obtained, than for adolescent boys.”⁶² In this context, “functional” connotes a “means to an end.” The desired “end” varies, but often has to do with mood stabilization. When a girl is upset, depressed, or bored, she might turn to music to cheer her up. Adolescent females don’t just listen to music for enjoyment; they use it towards an internal goal. This corresponds to my data. Females cited “spiritual development” twice as often as males as a reason they listened to CCM. They were far more likely to talk about the music’s inspirational qualities. For males, on the other hand,

⁶²P. G. Christenson and J. B. Peterson. "Genre and Gender in the Structure of Music Preferences." Communication Research 15.3 (1988), p. 287.

music *is* the end. They prove far less likely than women to speak in terms of what the music *does* to them. They cite taste most often as the reason they listen to CCM; “I just listen to the music because I enjoy it.”⁶³

If women see music as functional, what are those functions? A study conducted by Peter Christenson and Jon Peterson in 1988 takes a closer look. Among the several hundred Pennsylvania State students they interviewed, they reached similar conclusions to Gantz, writing “Females were more likely to agree that listening...made them feel less alone... helped to cheer them up when they were in a bad mood...and helped to get their minds off their worries.”⁶⁴ In my survey results, the terms “uplifting” and “inspiring” came up frequently in women’s responses, putting a religious spin on the characteristics Christenson and Peterson describe. CCM “has a positive influence,” one girl wrote. Another: CCM is “uplifting, thought-provoking, encouraging.” They listen to Christian music because it makes them feel better about their personal life or their relationship with God.

A CCM listener’s desire to commune with the divine takes the functionality theory of female music use one step further. In their responses to my survey questions, women were more likely to reply that they listened to CCM “to praise God.” For them the music has a function even beyond personal improvement: it worships the divine. It “pleases God when we worship in song,” one woman wrote to describe why she listens to CCM. Christian music “lifts my soul to HIM,” said another. Christenson and Peterson wrote “For females...the orientation [of music listenership] might be described as

⁶³ Here the question arises again, perhaps men’s relation to CCM is in fact similar to women’s, but men merely lack the ability to *express* that relationship. This likely does indeed play into the results, but as the subsequent arguments will show we can see from prior research that there is more at work than merely capacity for self-reflection.

⁶⁴ Christenson and Peterson, p. 297.

instrumental and social: Their choices are more guided by what music can do for them, either personally (as in mood control) or in connection with peer and courtship interactions.⁶⁵ These functions are both present in CCM consumer responses, but in discussing women's relationship to Christian music one must add tone more relationship: that with the divine.

As Christenson and Peterson put it, for males, by contrast, "music use and allegiance are *central and personal*."⁶⁶ The functional mentality comes up far less in male responses, the more typical answer being, "I like the music" or some variation thereof. One might gather from these sorts of responses that for them the sound is more important. Most approve of the lyrical messages, surely, but maybe they just want to rock. This too is supported by previous research. In a 1984 study in Sweden, Keith Roe found that girls were "significantly more likely to pay attention to lyrics" than men.⁶⁷ This tendency important for a genre solely defined by its lyrics. In response to whether the faith message should be made explicit in the lyrics, one female respondent wrote, "If it's not then what's the point?" If women care more about lyrics, CCM songs would naturally draw in Christian women. For men more focused on the sounds, CCM has little to offer that secular tunes do not.

The messages of the lyrics may speak more to female fans, but so too does their tone. A 1990 study conducted by Alan Wells helps shed light on what sort of emotions men and women relate to in music. He indexed college students' answers to musical questions according to a scale of emotions, and found that women tended to evidence more positive emotions in describing their relationship with music than men. Happiness

⁶⁵ Christenson and Peterson, p. 299.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Christenson and Peterson, p. 288.

came up 1.10 times per female respondent, but only 0.77 times per male. Love came up .92 times for females, .64 for men while hope checked in at .66 for females, .48 for men.

Males tended to score higher on negative emotions. They were more likely to mention anger (.30 for males vs. .06 for females), fear (0.17 vs. .10) and hate (.08 vs. .01). “Irregardless of what happens, what you do, who you are,” one male respondent in Wells’ study wrote, “[it] is of no consequence, it’s all bigger than us and we have no control over it.”⁶⁸

All this is relevant because Christian music is based on a religion that tend to emphasize the positive, the “good news.” The lyrics tend to be encouraging, joyous, upbeat and, above all, hopeful. Songs may express worry, concern or doubt, but these concerns are nearly always bracketed by the promise of divine love. According to Wells, such a positive message appeals more to female listeners. CCM songs feature the values of happiness, hope, and love – all values on which women scored higher – whereas one doesn’t often come across the values of anger and hate identified with males. While this stress-free pleasantness draws in women, it can alienate men. “I can relate to some of [the music],” one male respondent wrote in my study. “No one thinks ‘Thank you Jesus’ all the time.”

Thus we see previous studies on women and music provide strong theories of why women saw CCM as more functional than men, serving to better their relationship with God or improve them as individuals. The “means to an end” mentality proposed by Gantz et al. and Christenson et al. gives us clues as to why women are so much more effusive about what the music *does* to them while men just enjoy the sounds themselves.

⁶⁸ Alan Wells. Popular Music: Emotional use and Management." Journal of Popular Culture 24.1 (1990), p. 112.

We see the lyrical nature of CCM widening that divide by featuring characteristics more innately appealing to women. With these previous data as our guide, we see that the gender divide in survey responses can be explained at least in part by wider trends in music. The question then remains, does a similar gender divide exist in general religious practice?

Gender and Religion

Many pages have been written analyzing how men and women approach religion differently. However, most of the scholarship centers on investigating the preponderance of women in church pews. What, then, can we glean from this bulk of literature to explain, not why more women filled out surveys, but why women emphasized the spiritual aspects of the music so much more than men. Is there anything in the genders' differing religious outlooks that would indicate a stronger connection to the music on a spiritual level for females

The answer lies in one's conception of God. While this is a highly personalized subject, patterns can be traced along gender lines.⁶⁹ Several studies have been done on the topic and all have come to roughly the same conclusion: women see God as a friend, men see God as a judge. For instance, according to a 1990 study by Kenneth Stokes on faith development in different demographics, "significantly more women than men define 'faith' as 'a relationship with God' while more men than women define it as 'a set of beliefs.'" ⁷⁰ Seven years later, K. Helmut Reich noted that "whereas for boys God's

⁶⁹ Though not explicitly stated, all of the following statistics seemed to be based on Christian subjects.

⁷⁰ Kenneth Stokes. "Faith Development in the Adult Life Cycle." *Journal of Religious Gerontology*. 7, 1990, p. 175.

power, knowledge, and activities seem to be particularly important, for girls God's role as a friend and confidant stands out."⁷¹

If women think of God as a friend, CCM fits their worldview perfectly. Many of the songs are about getting closer to God, talking to God, asking God for help. Sample song titles by artists at Soulfest include "God Is Love," "Help Me Out God" and "Jesus Is Your Friend." Indeed, one artist sported an Urban Outfitters "Jesus is my homeboy" t-shirt, transforming an ironic fashion statement into a sincere declaration of a personal relationship. The God-as-friend outlook that women hold is a defining feature of CCM songwriting – sometimes the connection seems so personal that critics have begun referring to "Jesus is my girlfriend" songs.

Men who view God as a judge, a rule-maker, or a powerful overseer may have a harder time reconciling their belief system with CCM lyrics. CCM songs are almost never doctrinally specific, talking instead about Christianity at its most vague. The harsh dictator God of the Hebrew Bible makes nary a showing; the personal group-hug God of the Christian New Testament predominates. This is not just an outsider's observation; fans notice the content disparity too. "The music at Soulfest emphasizes relationships with Jesus over "religion" – meaning doctrinal beliefs," one wrote. Perhaps this contributes to why men are inclined to view CCM as less religiously relevant. The Jesus-as-homeboy message lends itself more towards female attitudes towards the divine and speaks to them on a spiritual level whereas even males who enjoy the music often describe the lyrical content as "cheesy."

⁷¹ K. Helmut Reich. "Do We Need a Theory for the Religious Development of Women?" International Journal for the Psychology of Religion. 7.2. 1997, p. 68.

This view of gender provides some insight into how CCM functions in the evangelical community. If women claim more spiritual inspiration from the music, what does this say about what the music is providing (or not) to believers? What characteristics does the music have in relation to listeners that appeals more to women? When Christian women talk about being inspired by the songs, being uplifted or encouraged, they are talking about an emotional response. Few men or women talk about the music as educative or instructional; one wouldn't turn to CCM for lessons on the Bible or morality, and a complete outsider listening to the most popular artists would get only the vaguest sense of Christian theology.

Entertainment Weekly recently posted a story about a Virginia pastor who each Sunday delivers his sermon in the costume of a character from that weekend's top-grossing film. One week last year he was *The Dark Knight's* Joker, the next he was Indiana Jones. His sermons use movies and popular culture to discuss morality and the Bible in terms he hopes young people can understand. "Pop culture is the language they speak," he says in the article. "This was about meeting them where they are and trying to build a bridge back to God."⁷²

In the end, this seems to be the primary purpose of CCM, for the young or old (but mostly the young). Few men or women say the music provides an effective substitute for church attendance or Bible study. Rather, it is an easily-digestible supplement, a simple way for believers to keep faith in their hearts and minds. The simplicity of the lyrics enables the accessibility, appealing to an emotional response about the most basic feel-good tenants of the religion. While fringe groups that exhibit

⁷² Josh Rottenberg. "Movies, Money, & God." *Entertainment Weekly*. May 15, 2009. <http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20277417,00.html>.

more sophisticated religious thinking in their lyrics exist, and occasionally achieve moderate popularity, listeners see such messages as secondary to CCM. Few men or women claimed CCM influenced their social political beliefs and many of those who said it influenced them religiously clarified that it *strengthened* their beliefs, which isn't really a change at all.

An apt comparison here might be the tent revivals of the Second Great Awakening. They too employed music to incite an emotional response from participants about the most basic messages of Christianity. The term "revival" is instructive, indicating that by coming to town the *revived* the Christian fervor of the people, reigniting the spark through passionate emotional displays. These weren't lectures or lessons for the head, but enthusiasm and encouragement for the heart and soul.

In this way, CCM too is a kind of revival, emphasizing experiential religion over doctrine. By taking this response particularly from women, we can see why men thinking of Christianity as a specific set of rules and beliefs might find the music less fulfilling. Not one respondent of either gender mentioned having learned something new about their belief system that weekend at Soulfest, but many said they were inspired or encouraged.

However, one important difference exists between the 19th century revival and the CCM experience. A primary purpose of the productions at the tent meeting was to engender conversion experiences among the viewers, which often took the very physical forms of speaking in tongues or convulsing. CCM, on the other hand, literally preaches to the converted. Though as we know the genre originally began as an attempt to save lost souls, by the twenty first century it has settled into the role of creating faith *renewals*, rarely conversions. The emotional response listeners exhibit come about because they

already believe what the lyrics are describing. All the music need do is tap into a pre-existing faith to inspire, encourage, and support the evangelical consumer.

These responses play into a larger trend in Christianity and perhaps Western religion in general: the movement towards utility. With the free market of religions competing for adherents, a central question in many believers' minds is "What can religion do for me?" In *Habits of the Heart*, sociologist Robert Bellah traces the rise of this individualized religion. In the 19th century, he writes, "[American] sermons turned more to Christ's love than to God's command. They became less doctrinal and more emotional and sentimental."⁷³ This move away from doctrine to emotion accompanied the trend towards "utilitarian individualism," where the believer sees religion as something that can benefit them in concrete ways. Bellah describes French political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville lamenting this mindset upon a visit to American in the 1830s and trying in vain to remind Americans of a definition of Christianity in which man "sees that order is God's plan, in freedom labors for this great design, ever sacrificing his private interests for this wondrous ordering of all that is, and *expecting no other reward than the joy of contemplating it*" (emphasis added).⁷⁴ Then and now, however, American Christians often *do* expect other rewards for their actions, in this life or the next. "I pray *so* God can answer my prayers," would be an example of this kind of thinking, or "I go to church *so* I can go to heaven." From one of his subjects Bellah coins the term "Sheilaism" to describe this me-first approach to religion. Ask not what you can do for your religion; ask what you religion can do *for you*.

⁷³ Robert N. Bellah. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkeley: University of California Press (1985), p. 223.

⁷⁴ Bellah, p. 223.

CCM is a clear instance of this utilitarian mindset translating to religious presentation, showing believers that through these songs Christianity can inspire or uplift an individual. The more dogmatic aspects of Christianity, the rules and responsibilities, the commitments and obligations are rarely exhibited. CCM songs are Christianity as a self-help guide, providing quick three-minute shortcuts to inspiration. At Soulfest the moment an artist began a religiously-direct “praise” song, eyes closed, hands went up, and looks of pure joy covered the faces on the field. Even at a tent revival such emotional responses took time and skill to cultivate, but CCM songs efficiently tap into evangelicals’ need for an emotional feel-good religion. What listeners, women in particular, find so valuable about CCM is what the songs *do for them*, continuing the story of religious utilitarianism into the twenty-first century. “Jesus rocks my soul” indeed.

Conclusion

Since its inception in the late '60s, the phenomenon known as contemporary Christian music has been pored over, scrutinized and dissected by scholars and journalists looking to discover how a genre based solely on lyrical content has continued to thrive. In the introduction we saw several ways scholars have approached it, trying to analyze the lyrical content of the music or figure out the inner mechanisms of the booming CCM industry. I talked about secular journalists journeying to CCM festivals and evangelical leaders lamenting the industry's perceived secularization. CCM has provoked discussion and controversy from both Christian and mainstream sources, provoking among the leadership while thriving among the evangelical masses.

These masses give us another direction from which to look at CCM, one that has been tragically underinvestigated. On the most fundamental level, Christian music is popular because people buy it. This paper looks at this consumer base to figure out *why* people buy it. This study makes no claims to be thorough or exhaustive, but merely provides a snapshot of one CCM community and its relationship to the music.

As we have seen, that relationship turns out to be more complex than an observer might suspect. Many people appreciate the sound more than the message, men and non-evangelicals particularly. For many, the value of the lyrics isn't what they are (Christian) but what they are *not* (dirty, sexual, worldly). When artists like Amy Grant cross over in the '90s or the Jonas Brothers become hitmakers today, we see such desires for "clean" music in the populace at large.

For other listeners, all that matters are the lyrics, and artists who sing songs with vague meanings are accused of selling out or even succumbing to Satan. I remember one

scene at Soulfest where between songs an artist asked everyone to lift their arms and join him in prayer. Most people did just that, arms held high, eyes closed, occasionally swaying and murmuring to themselves as the prayer continued. Others, however, heard the word “pray” and left to see what was happening on the other stages. If music wasn’t being made, they had no interest in sticking around.

Such are the tensions in the CCM audience. As we have seen, such tensions can be best understood by breaking down consumers by political persuasion, denomination, age and gender. Though a wide diversity of opinion exists among Soulfest attendees, the patterns that emerge tell us more about the state of CCM and help us predict where it is headed. As these young people who are far more open to secular music and hold far less stock in the religious value of the lyrics grow up, will the CCM phenomena fade? Will it become irretrievably mixed in to secular sounds, where *every* artist is a crossover? Or will age and maturity let young people find the religious relevance in CCM songs. Only time will tell. What remains clear is that this is a tension-rife genre with a complicated fan base, one that expresses such a wide array of preferences it threatens to splinter the world of CCM.

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Appendix A: Survey #1
Administered in person

Background

Age _____ Gender _____ Home State _____ Occupation _____

Home Environment (circle one)

- A) City
- B) Suburban
- C) Rural
- D) Other _____

Political Views (circle one)

- A) Very Liberal B) Somewhat Liberal
- C) Moderate D) Somewhat Conservative
- E) Very Conservative
- F) Other _____

Ethnicity (circle one)

- A) Caucasian B) African-American C) Latino/a D) Asian-American
- E) Other _____

Introductory Questions

Do you consider yourself Christian? (Y/N) _____

What denomination are you affiliated with, if any? _____

How often do you typically attend religious services? (circle one)

- A) More than once a week B) Once a week C) Once or twice a month
- D) Several times a year E) Never

How often do you attend church for reasons other than religious services? (e.g. youth group, Bible study, etc.)?

- A) More than once a week B) Once a week C) Once or twice a month
- D) Several times a year E) Never

On a scale of 0 to 4, how big of a role does Christian music play in your spiritual life and development? (0 = no role, 4 = of great significance) _____

Do an artist's religious beliefs influence your decision of whether to buy or download their music?

- A) Not at all B) A little C) Some D) A lot

How many **Christian** music albums do you buy or download in a typical month? _____

How many **non-Christian** music albums do you buy or download in a typical month? _____

How many **Christian** music events do you attend in a typical month? _____

Which of the following activities do you do? (check as many as apply)

- I shop at Christian book stores
- I visit Christian websites
- I listen to Christian radio
- I watch Christian television or movies

Open-Ended Questions

What brings you to this festival?

What does the term "Christian rock" suggest to you?

Why do you listen to Christian music?

Does it matter to you how explicit the religious content is in a Christian artist's lyrics? Explain.

Do the messages in the music differ from those you get from church or religious leaders? Explain or give an example.

Has Christian music influenced your religious beliefs? Explain or give an example.

Has Christian music influenced your social/political beliefs? Explain or give an example.

Do you have any other comments about your experience with Christian music? Or anything else?

To enter to win the iPod, write your email address below. All email correspondence will be confidential.

-
- Check this box if you are willing to answer follow-up questions via email. This will double your chances of winning the iPod.***

Appendix B: Survey #2 *Administered online*

What is your educational level?

- Currently in lower or middle school
- Currently in high school
- Did not graduate high school
- Graduated high school, did not graduate college
- Currently in college
- Graduated college
- Currently in business or professional school
- Graduated business or professional school

If you attend school, what type is it?

- Public
- Private
- Christian
- Home-school
- Do not currently attend school

Does your church preach about the importance of being “born again”?

Does your church preach about the inerrancy of scripture? (Is every word in the Bible literally true?)

Do spiritual gifts (ie. speaking in tongues, divine healing, etc.) play a part in your church?

Approximately what percentage of your church is Caucasian (white)?

How long have you been listening to Christian rock?

How many times have you gone to Soulfest (including 2008)?

How did you find out about this festival? (check as many as apply)

- From a friend or family member
- From church or youth group
- From Soulfest advertisement
- From the radio
- From website
- From artist(s)
- Other

How many **other** Christian music festivals had you been to (before Soulfest 2008)?

Where are you primarily when you listen to Christian music? (check as many as apply)

- Alone
- With family
- With youth group
- At concerts

How do you primarily acquire your Christian music? (check as many as apply)

- I purchase it in Christian bookstores
- I purchase it in mainstream stores
- I purchase it online
- I download it for free
- Through church/youth group
- From friends
- At concerts
- I don't listen to much Christian music
- Other

If you are eighteen or younger, do your parents listen this music?

If you have school-age children, do they listen to this music?

Approximately what percentage of the Christian music artists you listen to are Caucasian (white)?

Do you listen to religious music that isn't necessarily "Christian"?

What genre(s) of music do you listen to (check as many as apply)?

- Rock
- Pop
- Rap/hip-hop
- R&B
- Gospel
- Country
- Classical
- Adult contemporary
- Jazz
- Blues
- Folk
- Dance/electronic
- World music
- Other

Do you regularly listen to black gospel music?

Comments? Questions?