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# Secular Mode, Sacred Message: How Contemporary Christian Musicians are called by God to Perform

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## **Secular Mode, Sacred Message: How Contemporary Christian Musicians are Called by God to Perform**

In 1993, Steve Miller published his book *The Contemporary Christian Music Debate*. This was the first book on educating people on how to properly create and employ a modern Christian band. In it he talks about the importance of choosing the right style, genre, or mode. It is essential in “helping people truly worship” (Miller 1993). 50 years ago such a thought would have been perceived as blasphemous. Secular music was something that was set apart from the sacred space of the church. To mix the two would have been a sin of lust, and to make money from it a sin of greed (Molokotos-Liederman 2004, 410). But today contemporary Christian music is everywhere secular music is; they have their own concerts, radio stations, and even Woodstock-esque festivals. While they still exist in the church they have moved out into the ‘secular world’ as well.

Contemporary Christian music occupies nearly every genre of music today. Their styles range from country to heavy metal. Yet screaming into the microphone and making guttural noises doesn’t seem like it could possibly be a form of Christian worship. Or can it? The way in which Christian musicians have reinterpreted the acceptance of secular genres to promote a Christian message has changed dramatically over the course of Christian music history and most significantly within the last decade.

Contemporary Christian worship leaders within the church are consciously challenging, reinterpreting, and renegotiating religion to theologially justify the use of secular modes to spread the Christian message. In this study I will analyze how contemporary Christian musicians justify the use of various modes of musical performance.

I will also look at how the contemporary Christian musician understands their vocational calling and how they interpret their actions through a religious lens. 'Contemporary Christian musician' is a profession and because it is such comes with religious consequences. Earning a living through worship music would itself be seen as detrimental to Christian faith, but the way in which contemporary Christian musicians renegotiate their actions as a "calling by God" affirms their earnings are gained through a sacred means and encourages the enjoyment of such gain (Weber 2009, 142).

Studying this phenomenon sociologically requires the understanding of the meaning the contemporary Christian musician attributes to performing worship music. It also requires the historical significance of music in the church.

It is very difficult to study music sociologically as music is not a concrete thing. Music as the expression of a composer or of the lone singer in the shower has absolutely no real value (Silberman 1963, 68). Only when the inner concern and understanding of the music by the individual is expressed in a word, a gesture, a sound can the experience of music be observed and tested.

The patterns of musical creation and appreciation can change while society does not. Therefore, there is no one casual relationship between music and society (Weber 1958, v: Sheperd & Wicke, 1997, 49). But when analyzing music and society, or any art for that matter, it should be taken into account that art reflects society, and not the other way around (Overy, 2006, 436). For example, the artistic propaganda controlled by Stalin during World War II depicted what he called "social realism". Stalin tried to convince his people, through tedious manipulation of published artwork, his society was the way it appeared in scenes in opera, music,

paintings and sculpture (Overy, 2006, 443). Of course, people living under Stalin's regime at the time could tell fantasy from reality. The oppression they suffered did not coincide with the art that surrounded them (Overy, 2006, 443).

To study musicians and music listeners sociologically, one must be indifferent to the mode (Hood, 1971, 32, Adorno, 1976, 3). Personal biases cannot interfere with the perception of music. To know scientifically how a piece of music makes a person feel is nearly impossible. Experiments have been done that show increased heart rates in reaction to music but asking a person how music makes them feel is of uncertain accuracy. People who have not mastered the technical terminology of music will encounter insurmountable obstacles in verbalizing their own musical experiences (Adorno, 1976, 5). Take, for example, a quote by Friedrich Nietzsche on listening to Richard Wagner's music:

One walks into the sea, gradually loses one's secure footing, and finally surrenders oneself to the elements without reservation: one must *swim*. In older music, what one had to do...was something quite different, namely, to *dance*. (Nietzsche quoted in Horowitz, 1995).

This quote provides some idea of how one perceives music but it falls far short of scientific standards. Even if the listener feels a certain way about a performance, how are we to know that a particular performance was not the performer's best effort and comes off as perfunctory? Analyzing how one "feels" or derives "meaning" about music is difficult for this reason (Hood, 1971). However, the "meaning" of music not just an interpretive but a social process: musical meaning is not inherent, but rather, the experience of the music and the music's meanings themselves change complexly in relation to the "style-competence of the listener" and to the social situations in which they occur (Frith, 1996, 250). Music can never be played or heard outside a situation, and every situation will affect the music's meaning (Frith, 1996). There

exists a dual relationship between performer and audience and so it is necessary to understand the listener of the music as well for it is the audience that determines the success of the musician (Silbermann, 1963, 83).

There are several ways to listen to and experience music. In his book *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*, Theodor Adorno defines five types of music listeners: the expert, the good listener, the culture consumer, the emotional listener, the resentment listener. The *expert* is defined as someone who can “spontaneously follow the course of music” and is well educated in musical jargon. An example of an expert listener’s profession would be a director of a symphony. The *good listener* is opposed to the expert as he is only able to understand music through the way he views it introspectively. He understands music much in the same way that we understand our own language even though we are, at times, ignorant of its grammar and syntax. This is someone who “likes” music and has, historically, been seen in upper-class arenas like courts and aristocratic circles (Adorno, 1976, 6). The third type is called the *culture consumer*. He is a well-informed, frequent listener of music. He respects music as a part of culture and has a tendency to “hoard as much musical information as possible”. The culture consumer is named as such because he perpetuates the commodification of music (Adorno, 1976, 8). Increasingly, the musical cultural commodities governed by this type are transformed into commodities of “manipulated consumption”. They are quantified and in turn are given value for consumption (Carrette & King, 2005, 124). The next type is the *emotional listener*. He listens to music for the sake of music and does not listen to it structurally. Music to the emotional listener is a medium of pure emotional projection. This type of listener is easily moved to tears and considers music a means to an end in driving his emotions. The last type of listener is called by Adorno to be the *resentment listener*. This type of listener is one who resents the emergence of new music and

holds onto the “old” music of times before the Romantic Period, a period of classical music in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that showcased the “romantic” side of music (Klaus, 1970).

The musician is a member of society like anyone else. His ability to make a living may be associated with his artistic role (Weber, 1958, xi). That is to say he could be a full-time musician making money in this way or simply a musical hobbyist. Unlike most professions the musician requires an audience and he performs music for the audience with instruments suitable for the technology of his time (Weber, 1958, 108). As per social behaviorism, sociologists study the ways in which people act towards one another. This implies that not only is social behavior an action between individuals that can be observed but meaningful as well (Burns, 1991). Weber points out that humans do not change their nature when they turn their behavior towards arts (1958, xxii). The same tendencies apparent in other spheres of life are apparent here as well. (Weber, 1958, xxii).

The musical profession is a direct consequence of the economics of music (Silbermann, 1963, 157). Modern sociology has recognized that our society is maintained by the mutual dependence of highly specialized and differentiated occupational groups (Caplow, 1954, 4). It is of no surprise, then, that the occupation of professional musician would eventually manifest. The contemporary Christian musician is an outcome of our modern society and its religious historical past.

Weber insists that rationality is a motivating force in all spheres of life and in the case of the contemporary Christian musician this is no different (Weber, 1958, Weber 2009). In his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber describes how the concept of the calling has driven people to earn money to glorify God. The general modern human civilization was built

upon the “rational organization of life” based on the idea of the calling. Only through activity, not idleness, can one serve God (Weber, 2009, 142). The contemporary Christian musicians’ music performance *is* his work. He makes money from playing music for an audience to spread God’s message.

The development of towns in the later middle ages brought with it a revolution in music-making inside the church (Raynor, 1972, 55). Professional musicians were hired from musician guilds to play for the church and church ceremonies.

Working for God takes its roots in the early Catholic Church which held work in high esteem (Weber, 2009, 143). In fact, the highest form of monastery “productivity” was in ascetic duties such as choir service (Weber, 2009, 143). According to the *Protestant Ethic*, rational and consistent work is a calling demanded by God. The contemporary Christian musician also has this calling. They view their work in musical worship as a vocation and actively accept wealth because they labor for God, and not for this-worldly enjoyment. Therefore the accumulation of wealth is only “evil” when it tempts the collector to enjoy a sinful life of lazy restfulness (Weber, 2009, 146). In addition, gaining wealth through a vocational calling, such as a contemporary musician, is morally permitted and encouraged (Weber, 2009, 146). Wealth gained through a musical vocation which glorifies God is, in fact, a blessing.

Music has often been connected with religious and even more primitive magical practices (Honigsheim, 1973, 43). In the church, music is an element of worship, filling a necessary place in the ritual, has to be correctly executed (Raynor 1972, 16). Any mistake in the worship music was held to be disrespectful of God and needed to be repeated until it was perfected.

In the medieval church, by the year 1000, secular music-making was beginning to exert a powerful influence on the development of church music. In fact, the Christian church used it, as pagan worship had done, for the sake of other-worldly atmospheres which it could and to remove worship from the realm of subjective personal experience (Raynor, 1972, 16). The bringing in of secular musicians to perform secular-sounding music in a sacred place seems to defy the sacred-secular dichotomy first described by Emile Durkheim.

### THE MUSIC PERFORMANCE RITUAL

Durkheim conceptualized the sacred-secular dichotomy as more or less absolute when he defined the sacred as those things that are “set apart” from everyday mundane social life (Durkheim, 2008). Even though he described the “social origins” of religion, Durkheim assumed a separation between the sacred and the secular arguing that these two terms constitute “separate worlds” as “. . . religious and profane life cannot coexist in the same place” (Durkheim 2008, 35-40).

More recently, scholars have attempted to clarify these conceptualizations by distinguishing between terms that were used by Durkheim. For example, one of the main concerns of Becker’s (1950) study was to make clear the distinctions between the sacred and religion and the secular and profane; “the sacred is not synonymous with the holy or religious and the secular is not the same thing as the profane” (Becker quoted in Chang & Lim, 2009, 393).

One thing is clear, however, and that is Durkheim’s concept of the ritual. Durkheim pointed out four primary functions of religions and ceremonies. First, he said they served a disciplinary function, since self-discipline is necessary in society, and a proprietor function, helping people to adjust to society. Second, he claimed that ceremonies brought people within

the ritual together. Third, ceremonies and rituals remind people of their commonality and the past. Fourth, rituals excite people to become social, that is, it helps a group overcome difficulties and strengthens its people (Durkheim, 2008). The ritual is also something that transforms a natural object into something supernatural, and more importantly, holy (Scruton, 1997, 458). According to Scruton, the purpose of a ritual lies “beyond the moment”, it promises salvation, revelation or restoration of the soul’s natural harmony (1997, 460). Shepherd and Wicke would go so far as to say that music and music performance is not merely a form of leisure or entertainment: it is central to the very formation and reproduction of human societies (1997).

The performing of musical rituals differentiate the musical experience from everyday life. The term “performance” defines a social, or communicative process (Frith, 1996, 205). It is almost impossible to talk about performances without mentioning Goffman. He says that “at one extreme, one finds that the performer can be fully taken in by his own act; he can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality” (Kivisto, 2008, 253). He goes on to say that “when [the performer’s] audience is also convinced in this way about the show he puts on ... then ... only the sociologist or the socially disgruntled will have any doubts about the ‘realness’ of what is presented” (253). The thesis of Frith on performances in popular music states that even the act of listening is in itself a performance (1996, 203). Just as a guitarist is both performing a song and performing the performance of the song, so are we, as an audience, listening both to the song and to its performance. We hear music we like as something special, as something that defies the mundane, from this perspective, special not just with reference to other music but, more important, to the rest of life (Schalit, 2000).

Weber’s concept of the calling as defined in *Protestant Ethic* as “the calling by God into a vocation, or specific line of coherent work, and hence becoming duty-bound to it” is of primary

concern in this study (Weber, 2009, 18). How the contemporary Christian musician understands his vocational calling in worship music is exactly what I am studying.

## THE HISTORY OF THE CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN MUSIC INDUSTRY

The growth of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) has seen incredible growth in the past few decades, from \$188 million in music sales in 1990 to almost \$700 million in 2007 (“Industry Overview,” 2007). In 2006, sales in the CCM genre brought in more revenue than jazz and classical and accounted for nearly 7% of total sales in the general music industry. Even with the downhill sales trend in the overall music industry, CCM continues to maintain its financial stability with the Christian rock genre growing by over 125% from 2004 to 2005.

Contemporary Christian musicians occupy various genres of music. In the beginning contemporary Christian music was limited to genres like country, adult contemporary, and soft-rock (Bennet, 2000, 35). Now, the CCM industry includes almost all of the genres found in secular music today (Baker, 1979). Even genres such as death metal now have contemporary Christian bands that shred their electric guitars, stomp on double bass pedals and scream into the microphone all in the name of Jesus. If this event were to be witnessed 50 years ago the mainstream Christian would be utterly appalled regardless of the message. The acceptance of these secular genres by Christians, specifically Evangelicals, was not immediate; they had to “warm-up” to the idea of the youth culture engaging in secular acts with a religious agenda.

This process started out slowly. While there were bands here and there that were fully Christian in orientation, none were mainstream or popular enough to gain any attention, let alone revenue. Mainstream culture did not want to hear Christian music played on the radio because it was “too preachy” and Christian radio listeners did not like Christian music on the radio because

it was going “too far” (Ali, 2001, 41). The popularity of Christian music happened somewhat accidentally with the injection of the word “Jesus” into popular, otherwise secular, songs.

During the late 1950s and into the 1960s, the popularity of Jesus as the subject of secular songs was growing with songs such as “Mrs. Robinson” by Simon and Garfunkel in which the most popular line is: “Here’s to you, Mrs. Robinson; Jesus loves you more than you should know. The song was actually poking fun at religion and was the first time the name Jesus appeared in a popular song. Then, Norman Greenbaum’s “Spirit in the Sky” says you’ve “[got to] have a friend in Jesus.” Even with all of these popular songs referencing Jesus, authentic Christian music didn’t reach the top charts until Larry Norman released *Upon This Rock* in 1969. His message in the song “Why Should The Devil Have All The Good Music?” is that rock music did not cause people, specifically the youth, to fall into evil (Baker, 1979). He was a champion of the youth in the battle for Christian rock acceptance against the anti-rock evangelists who were stirring up adults against Christian rock.

Conservative Evangelical Christians have historically interpreted rock and roll as hostile to the Christian faith (Bacchiocchi, 2000). When rock and roll music became popular in the late 1950s and into the 1960s, leaders in the Evangelical Christian community such as Jerry Falwell declared what they saw on stage as an immoral musical form (Klatt, 1987). In allegiance with this ideology David Noebel, in regard to rock and roll, writes:

[Rock musicians] were pro-drugs, pro-evolution, pro-promiscuous sex; anti-Christ and more... Rock music is a negation of soul, spirit, and mind, and is destructive to the body... It’s also been shown that rock music destroys house plants. If it destroys God’s plants, what’s it doing to young people?” (Joseph, 1999)

Other views expressing the contempt of rock and roll were ideas like: rock and roll was the devil’s music; that it was commercial, which by nature was against religious values; that Christian Rock was a “shallow and distorted version of the gospel”; and that Christian Rock was

a mediocre version of true rock and roll or a bad imitation (Baker, 1979; Howard & Streck, 1996).

Christian musicians today do not suffer such a heavy onslaught about their music being detrimental to the Christian faith as they did in the past. Christian musicians distinguish between their music and secular music, arguing that the musical medium is an inherently neutral implement. Romanowski suggests “Christian Rock stars and the industry have argued repeatedly for the neutrality of music as a defense against contentions that the beat of rock is inherently evil” (1990). If Christian musicians use what were once thought of as secular genres to transmit the Christian message, then to many Evangelicals that particular music can and should be appropriated for religious purposes (Romanowski 1990). The emphasis here is that Evangelicals believe it *should* be used for religious purposes. That is to say those Evangelicals who once opposed the style of music now embrace the medium because it promotes a Christian message that carries with it Christian values. Even certain musicals such as *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* in 1968 and *Jesus Christ Superstar* in 1970 were being embraced by the Christian community to get younger people excited about Christianity (Wilson-Dickson, 1996, 242).

In this study I will focus on how contemporary Christian musicians as religious social actors spread the Christian message utilizing a music medium, justify that use, and adapt to changes within the context of an ever-increasing secular society.

## METHODOLOGY

Ethnography was the primary research approach used in this study. Field notes taken in respect to ethnography are an effective way of documenting individual cultures (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). Qualitative data were collected using three different methods: observation, participation, and informal interviews. At musical concert events I took written field notes describing what I was observing as it happened in real time. When I was physically participating in an event I was unable to take notes until afterward. During quieter moments such as the informal interviews I was able to tape record the conversation in addition to taking active notes. These methods helped me to answer the following questions:

1. How do contemporary Christian musicians understand and interpret their actions of creating and performing Christian music?
2. How do Christian musicians justify the use of secular music?
3. How are Christian musicians reinterpreting religious ideology in a modern secular society?

Data collected through observation required attending several Christian music concerts. I observed the behavior of the band members on stage as well as the audience members in the pit. I also observed the interaction between the two groups during various “call and response” moments and during times when the lead singers would speak to the crowd. Observation data will allow me to make sense of how Christian musicians are using their music and music venues as a way of inspiring Christian revival and promoting Christian values. Bands observed in live performance were, in alphabetical order: Bread Of Stone, Carlos Whittaker, Jeremy Camp, John Mark McMillan, Manafest, Me In Motion, and Superchick.

Data were also collected through actual participation in a Christian music event. I played violin for a worship group at the University Lutheran Church of the Epiphany. Engaging in the music making process with the very people I am studying was the perfect opportunity to collect data at the micro-level. During this time I followed the orders of the band leader and in no way attempted to interject my personal opinion in any matters, musical or otherwise. In addition, I attended several Wednesday night dinners and worship services at the same church whose group I played with interacting with several worship service band members and members of the church. These data will be necessary to analyze the sacred-secular relationship in Christian music.

The most significant data that were collected were done so by informal interviews. They are labeled informal because I did not arrange any of these interviews ahead of time. All of them were conducted either at events such as Christian music concerts or at worship services at a Christian church. These data are critical in analyzing the inspiration of religious revival on the micro-level, how Christian musicians promote Christian values and how they justify their secular means of worship. It should be noted that I have taken data from an interview at a pre-show event of which I did not personally conduct but was present at the time of the interview. This was an interview with Jeremy Camp, John Mark McMillan, and Carlos Whittaker. At the conclusion of this particular interview people in attendance were able to ask questions of their own. The data supplied in the answers to those questions and my own are used in this study.

All of my research was conducted in the state of Minnesota in the cities of Montevideo, Willmar, St. Cloud and Minneapolis. While the racial diversity of the crowd increased as population of the cities increased it should be noticed that the audience was overwhelmingly white. The majority of band members were also white. Only two bands, Super Chick and Carlos

Whittaker, had a non-white member. In addition, Super Chick was the only band to have female members of which it had two.

When citing “field notes” this term refers to notes taken in “the field”. In respect to ethnomusicology, the field is wherever you find the subject in its natural environment (Hood, 1971, 206).

Throughout the rest of this study, I examine how religion has become a key tool in perpetuating virtually every aspect of musical creation in the contemporary Christian music society. From practicing to performing, I suggest that religion, specifically worshiping God, is the motivating factor in spreading the Christian message. This message is so important to the contemporary Christian that the mode is only considered as a means to reach the audience. This mean is justified as it leads to the deliverance of the sacred message.

## **THE REINVENTION TOUR**

On September 22, 2010, Grammy nominated Christian pop/rock band Superchick started its “Reinvention Tour”. Visiting over twenty cities in the U.S. in early November, Superchick was joined by guest Christian artists Manafest, Me In Motion and Bread of Stone. On the official Superchick website bassist Matt Dally describes the Reinvention Tour:

‘Reinvention’ is a word that means change, and that is what we expect on this tour: God to show up like never before and change our lives forever. We want your life to be different when you walk out of the show; I want my life to be different as well. Come and see God transform us all to be closer to Him. Oh and it’s going to rock your face off too! (Superchick Blog, 2010)

The tour brought these bands through Willmar, MN where I attended a concert at the Willmar Civic Center. When I walked into the entrance I noticed the majority of concert goers

were young girls around the ages of 12 to 15. They were flocking around tables of merchandise for the respective bands. Various CD's, t-shirts, necklaces and posters could be purchased from slightly older teenage girls dressed in flashy tees, 'skater' belts, wearing spiked hair and sideways baseball caps who operated the booths. The concessions stand sold items similar to a movie theater selling such things as; pop, popcorn, candy and pretzels; however no alcohol was to be found.

The whole concert was, to a large extent, scripted. That is to say each band had almost the exact same pattern of performance. First, there would be an introduction that included a light show where each band member would come on one or two at a time with the lead singer always being the last to come on stage. As soon as the lead singer was up to the microphone the concert began. After a few songs the bands would take a small break and the lead singer would talk to the audience about a struggle that they have been, or are currently, dealing with. They would go on to reveal how God has helped them cope with their situations. After each speech the bands would play their final song.

Between each band, an emcee named Patrick would come on stage and each time introduce a new 'friend' to the audience. All the 'friends' were adults involved in some form of religious extracurricular and encouraged people to get involved with their particular group. They encouraged participation in organizations such as Campus Life, an organization that teaches high school seniors about making good choices when going to college and be a "life-long follower of Jesus Christ" (Field Notes). They also promoted Youth for Christ, a program where "young people have the opportunity to make an informed decision about Jesus Christ and to become part of the local church" (Field Notes). Other topics mentioned were generic involvement in music at your local churches. The emcee and his friends encouraged musical involvement in all churches.

The actual concert took place inside the main part of the Civic Center which doubled as a gymnasium. Most of the people sat on the bleachers while others joined the pit, the area people gather directly in front of the stage. The demographic of the bleachers was primarily young girls and most of the parents sat on the bleachers during the concert. In the pit there were also a majority of young teenage girls with a few younger boys and parents standing a few feet behind the pit.

The demographic is in no way a coincidence. Individual tastes in music, contemporary Christian in this case, are socially determined. Similar to individual identity, individual tastes are really examples of collective taste, reflecting consumer's gender, class and ethnic backgrounds (Frith 1996, 276, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2008, 178). Tastes do not just derive from our socially constructed identities; they also help to shape them (Levine, 1996, 206-207).

Nowhere during the entire concert did a religious symbol appear on stage. In fact, I didn't see a necklace with a cross on it or a What-Would-Jesus-Do? bracelet anywhere. While it is more than likely there were people adorning these accessories at the concert, what makes the observation significant is that rate at which they appeared was very rare. It was also an unexpected finding. Why, at a Christian event, would their *not* be religious symbols? It is because the musicians are very much aware of the image that they portray (Chang & Lim, 2009, 405). From this awareness stems the ability to manipulate their image to appear much more secular in orientation. Manipulation of their image resulted in the elimination of religious symbols and aligning their dress with secular appeal.

It would be difficult for an outsider to identify this concert as a Christian one having only viewed a slideshow of the event. Every facet of the concert has been secularized. The only

difference between this concert and a secular concert is the message of the music and its musicians. The secularization of everything within the space in which contemporary Christian music is being performed is necessary because it functions as a way to define the social space for those who observe it (Kivisto, 2008 pg. 255). In this way this space is removed from that of a church and is now a setting for a secular activity but with a sacred message. The space is a place where people can generate solidarity in relation to the ideologies present so that later they can go out and apply what they have learned.

Altogether there were four bands at this particular venue and in the interest of this study it is necessary to analyze each of them so as to find commonalities between them and further the understanding of how contemporary Christian musicians are harnessing religion to facilitate the onward momentum of capitalism. Differences are also being studied but it will be shown that the differences are neither all that different nor significant. Factors being considered are the purpose of the music, the style of the music, the appearance of the group and the content of the lyrics.

### **Superchick**

The band Superchick includes lead vocalist Tricia Brock and her sister Melissa Brock on vocals and rhythm guitar, Matt Dally playing bass, Dave Ghazarian on lead guitar, and various artists playing the drums. They have six albums to date and have sold nearly one million copies combined. They have 5 number one hit singles on Christian Hit Radio and have had songs featured on both MTV's Real World and Road Rules, Legally Blonde and Stuart Little, to name a few (Superchick Blog, 2010).

The stars of the Reinvention Tour, Superchick drew the biggest crowd. The band members were dressed in all white and full of energy. Their stage presence was very much like

any other rock and roll band. They had a dramatic entrance that included a dazzling light show while the lead guitarist jumped up onto an amp and, using the three hundred sixty degree arm spin, repeatedly struck a power chord that signaled the lead singer to make her entrance. When Tricia Brock walked out on stage the audience cheered louder than ever before.

They were the only band on the tour that featured female band members, the band had two and they were sisters to boot. They are also unique in the fact that the only African American musician at the event was in Superchick playing the drums.

Their lyrics were very secular. The lyrics had very few Christian references such as “Jesus” or a capitalized pronoun. Even in songs where there was absolutely zero mention of Jesus, audience members inferred the lyrics were religiously motivated. They opened with a song from their earlier tour “Operation: Beautiful” where they advocated that each girl is “beautiful in her own way”. A mother of one of the girls in attendance at the concert had this to say about the song and its lyrics:

I liked it when they reminded the ladies in the audience, young and older, that they are truly beautiful. No matter what the world wants them to be, God has made each and every one of them beautiful in their own way. Let's stop worrying about the world and what it says. Love yourself, respect yourself, and resist the pressures. Jesus Christ will give you that strength.

The quote above aligns itself closely with a reoccurring theme in Superchick's lyrics. Each song is an anthem about the alleviation of negative feelings and religion is the tool to which these feelings can be assuaged. In this regard their lyrics sound like something one would read in a self-help book. For instance, in the song “One and Lonely” Tricia sings “we all have bad hair days/Those nothing good about me days/Just keep moving on cause they'll be gone”. The song “Hey Hey” goes on to argue “some people you can never please/You might as well just let them be” and “why try to be like someone else/When you can only be yourself?” The self-help they

offer is in the context of a larger secular society and through events such as concerts these beliefs are transmuted into music which are then performed.

Tricia Brock spoke to the audience before the last song and told a story about a relative suffering from brain cancer. After she had told about the tribulations of this relative she offered this advice to the audience:

Sometimes in life you get the feeling like it's not fair. Whether you feel that way about the world, friends, or family, remember that every day is a gift. Every day we have the opportunity to live life to the fullest. In this crazy world it's easy to get selfish about our feelings but with God you can find peace when it doesn't seem fair or make sense.

This quote reiterates the theme present in the lyrics and reinforces the idea that religion can be harnessed to alleviate negative feelings and emotions. In essence, Superchick is hoping to use their lyrics to transform the lives of their listeners through music.

## **Me In Motion**

The trio Me In Motion came on stage dressed in indie outfits and waving their hands in the air getting the audience excited about their opening number: "Loser". The focus of the song was on the archetypal "loser". Lyrics include mention of a potential "four-eyed Jesus" and explained that "someone has to be the victim//someone has to be alone". Seth Mosley, the lead singer of Me In Motion, describes the song as a "banner song for anyone who has ever felt rejected by their peers" he goes on to say:

...the song is also a callout [sic] for us to open our eyes and see the 'least of these' that Jesus talked about who are all around us. My favorite line in Losers says, 'Maybe that's a four-eyed Jesus, coming from a broken home...' So the song is saying let's look at people through eyes of mercy and compassion as Jesus would and let's love them as if they were Jesus because he told us as we do unto them, we do unto him. (meinmotion.com)

The idea of treating people fairly regardless of their appearances is a very this-worldly concept but in this context it is motivated by Christian ideologies. This song also targets those who feel like the “loser” in the song. In this way religion is used as a way to cope with negative emotions.

When it came time during the concert for lead singer Seth Mosley to speak to the audience he talked about the Christian identity. He said that society and social networking sites like Facebook are “forcing ideas of life, clothes, cars and who we should be”. He explained that identity is not derived from material possessions like clothes, cars, etc, but “our identity is that we are all children of our King”. Seth emphasized that as the world changes and becomes “weirder and weirder” followers of Christ must be “stronger and stronger in their faith” (Field Notes).

The overall lyrical content of Me In Motion’s songs are much more religious than that of Superchick. Every song Me In Motion performed at the Reinvention Tour included a religious word such as “God”, “cross” and “gospel”.

### **Bread Of Stone**

The pop/rock band Bread Of Stone is a quartet consisting of voice, electric guitar, bass and drums. Their opening number was entitled “Letting Go” and talks about lead singer Ben Kristijanto’s journey into a deeper relationship with Jesus (Bread Of Stone official website). The opening verse reads:

Lord I come before You now. To worship You to worship You  
I lay aside the obvious everyday mundane concerns to worship you.

Bread of Stone is another band at the Reinvention tour that heavily referenced religious ideas, even more so than Me In Motion. In this particular song he talks about how worshiping for God is much more important than the “mundane concerns”. More importantly worshiping God is more important than the music being performed. It’s not about the music it is about the lyrics; the message not the mode.

Bread of Stone is unique from the other bands on the Reinvention Tour because they bring the discussion of Jesus to the forefront of their music. In his talk to the audience he told about how he came to the calling of Christian music when he “heard the word of God”. He emphasized that it’s more important to believe in Jesus than worrying about going to hell (Field Notes).

## **Manafest**

Manafest stood out at the Reinvention Tour being the only hard rock/rap rock group to perform. The lead singer, Chris Greenwood, wore black jeans, a leather jacket over a white t-shirt and a black baseball cap. The guitarist had chains hanging off his black jeans and a red bandana over his nose and mouth. The actual music being performed involved several instances of screaming into the microphone and leading the audience in a call and response wherein the lead singer would yell “ugh!” and the audience would yell back the same “ugh!”. At one point all the members except the lead singer adorned gas masks for their song “Quit Thuggin”.

Lyrical speaking, Manafest is secular. There was no mention of any religious words or phrases within the songs Manafest played at the Reinvention Tour. But just like the other bands the songs were about personal suffering like in the song “Avalanche”:

Sign my life out, I'm sick of living in a shell. If you can help choir boy ring the church bells/I'd turn back if I could, erase the pain if I could, but I'm an animal and I don't know if I can

The meaning of this song is revealed in the speech Chris Greenwood gave to the audience during a break in the performance. He tried to reach out to those in the audience who were “struggling with fear”. Greenwood told them they didn't have anything to fear as God is always with them wherever they go. He related to them by telling the audience about his teenage years and how he struggled with fear and struggled with wanting to be popular. He told the audience not to worry about what other people think about you and to “be yourself”. Greenwood also shared with the crowd that when he was 12 years old his father committed suicide. That event, he says, lead him “to scripture” and made him “brave”. He then explained to the audience that if following Christ can work for him, then it can work for the rest of those struggling with the same emotions.

## **THE RED CHAIR**

When I went to the St. Cloud Civic Center in St. Cloud, Minnesota to attend Jeremy Camp's Worship Tour I had the unique opportunity to sit in on a pre-show event. This event was called The Red Chair and it took place on the second floor of the Civic Center in St. Cloud and was a conversation about music and worship specifically for new and already existing worship leaders.

The conversation was lead by Jeremy Camp, John Mark McMillan, and Carlos Whittaker. Jeremy Camp is an ordained minister turned contemporary Christian musician with 17 number-one hit singles. He is also a three time Gospel Music Association (GMA) winner taking the award for new artist of the year, male vocalist of the year, and his song “Stay” won the GMA's rock recorded song of the year all in 2005. John Mark McMillan is best known for his

single “How He Loves”, a song about a late friend of McMillan. “How He Lives” has been covered by bands such as Todd Agnew, New Breed, Flyleaf and more. Lesser known than Jeremy Camp, McMillan is the lead in a band by his name that falls in the genre of contemporary Christian worship music and alternative rock. Carlos Whittaker was a pastor at Sandals Church in Riverside, California for 10 years before becoming a recording artist and touring with artist Jeremy Camp.

Roughly 30 chairs were set out facing three empty red chairs below a cross covered in vines and branches. I was among the first to arrive and eagerly sat in the front row armed with my tape recorder, pen, and paper. A camera crew for the online magazine YagaMag was poised to stream the conversation live over the internet. As people began to trickle in I could hear the excitement in people’s voices as they introduced themselves to those around them. People came from as far as Tennessee to this event to listen to the conversation. When Jeremy Camp, John Mark McMillan, and Carlos Whittaker entered everyone in the room stood up and applauded.

Without delay, Whittaker began the conversation with a word of prayer: “let us honor [God] through our words” he said. He explained that this event was for already existing or up and coming worship leaders who wanted to talk about ministry and music within the church and in the community. Overhearing several people introduce themselves I knew that many of the individuals present in the audience were pastors, worship leaders or family and friends of such people. The audience listened eagerly and frequent audible sounds of approval came from the audience during the time Jeremy and others were speaking.

Carlos Whittaker shared with the audience his motto in recent years about worship music and in the church. He brings up a new way of thinking about music and Christianity and shares with the audience this idea of “disturbance”:

God is calling me to disturb the career Christian, to shake them up a bit. When we feel closest to the lord is when things are kind of crazy. In order to clean something you throw it in the washing machine, what happens in that machine? It gets *agitated*. The dirt is coming off of it and it's getting clean. That's what we have to do with our congregations. Not for the sake of disturbance but in order for them to see Christ fresh again and clean again. Step back for a second and look at old Miss Jane on that pew back there, she looks a little too comfortable I need to open her eyes so she can catch a glimpse of Jesus fresh again. It could something as simple as moving the worship set around the schedule of church like putting it before the sermon so those who don't like it are stuck and have to listen to it. [laughter] Instrumental maybe? Or how about this: silence. Wow. Turn things off, let's see how comfortable everybody gets and see just how loud God is screaming in those times of silence. I remember when I was addicted to social media. I was so addicted that I decided to shut off for a month. I don't want my kids to see this part of their dad, you know? Silence was so loud, it was so deafening. God was screaming at me. This is the kind of disturbance we need in our congregations.

This quote reveals something of interest about the environment inside Christian churches. Pastors and worship leaders are aware that people are not as excited as they used to be about going to church. Music is a way to inspire that excitement in church. Whittaker's idea of disturbance is a conscious effort to change the inner workings of the church and get people excited about attendance and excited about worshiping Jesus. This is a highly progressive movement within the church that is being carried out by worship leaders all over the country and almost everyone in the room at the Red Chair event.

An audience member shared Whittaker's views on “disturbing” the church and added that “God is calling me to [perform] worship music”. This audience member also shared some valuable insight into the way in which contemporary Christian musicians understand their calling to perform worship service:

God is calling me to make music. And through music I worship Him. But it's not just performing in front of the congregation where you worship. Practicing in itself is a form of worship. Practicing an instrument is important because God calls us to play skillfully. You can't go up on stage and play sloppily; you have to play it well not only for them but for you and for God.

Religious motivation for practicing was a surprising finding. Adherence to the technical demands of western music can be found in virtually all forms of secular music (Blaukopf 1992). Classical musicians can study their instrument for years never once playing a single note "for God". This particular audience member has demonstrated that the way in which a contemporary Christian musician understands their personal development in their instrument is religiously motivated. I approached this audience member after the event and asked him to expand on that thought. He said that "God created music and he didn't create it poorly, so we shouldn't play it poorly, we should play it good [sic]."

In this way, all of the facets of music performance are inspired by religion. A female worship leader in the audience at the Red Chair event said that she has to "pump herself up" before she gets on stage for the sake of herself and for her congregation but more importantly "for Jesus, because he goes through me, through my music, and out to my people".

John Mark McMillan's concept of worship is very similar to Whittaker's. McMillan's purpose of worship he says is to "enjoy God". In addition, during his explanation of why it's important to perform music in a worship service he uses Whittaker's disturbance vernacular:

The idea of disturbing and disrupting gets people to realize that the most beautiful person in the world [Jesus] is in love with you. You're frustrated about your job, family, economy, but the most wonderful person in the world is perusing you like a lion. And to me that is my whole concept of worship. C.S. Lewis said man's chief aim is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. That's what worship is: to enjoy god. Man spontaneously enjoys god. What's the point of driving by the sunset and not enjoying it with anyone, what's the point of telling a joke if no one is there to enjoy it? It's funnier when you tell it and other people laugh, it completes the enjoyment. The enjoyment of God is completed when you express how much you enjoy it. I tell my wife she is beautiful to

express how much I love her. It is the same as loving Jesus and it is complete with the action of praising God out loud. That's disrupting and disturbing.

Detailed herein is the relationship between the creator of the music, the musician, and the audience. To make music by oneself is not what the calling to be a worship leader is about. Only by completing the process and presenting the music to an audience is honoring God. McMillan describes the process by "enjoying" God. Enjoying God by yourself is only half of the process; the latter half is complete if and only if you're enjoying God with others. Jeremy Camp agrees with the idea of enjoying through self and others but he provides a warning:

It's so fulfilling and warm to be with God while you're making music. You want to stay in that moment, in that place, forever. It's so easy to get wrapped up in God's love and say [with his hand spread open above his head towards the ceiling] I don't want this moment to end I want to be with you forever. But if you do that you're indulging in an act of selfishness and it detracts from the message that you're sending to the congregation.

Again, this reiteration of enjoying God with someone else is evident. To play music purely for yourself is not sacred. The music must be shared with others. Camp also warns not to go too far into either direction. You must play music for yourself and the audience but only through God and with God in mind. Camp explains that you cannot do it solely for the people because "you can't love God if you don't love the people". Focusing too much on the audience can cause one to "lose that connection with Jesus". And so exists a delicate balance between performing for the audience, performing for you, and for God. Only when these three are in harmony, so to speak, is the action, and moreover the music, sacred.

When it came time for questions from the audience at The Red Chair event I asked them to provide an explanation as to why there are so many genres of music and which genres were acceptable and which were not. John Mark McMillan's answer provides an explanation as well as a purpose for the existence of different genres and their use in concerts and churches alike:

Every church family is different, it's all going to look different, they worship different ways, talk different ways but God is always the same. Our expression constantly changes and differs from place to place. Everywhere every person is different. We had a guy lead worship ripping 70s rock and roll and we had to give out ear plugs for people and elderly people would shake their canes because they're excited for Jesus and the next week we'd sing hymns and kids would cry. It's not about style it was about that we came together to love each other and celebrate who Jesus was. It's not about the style of music but it should represent the people you've been called to cultivate. If you have people who aren't comfortable, it's not that you can't get them to like it, but ultimately what is your expression of your group of people? Who are your people? You represent them. You create their voice.

The genre of music, or mode, is a way to pique the listener's interest. Those who identify with a particular genre can relate to the music and therefore the message (Deacy 2005). In McMillan's response it is clear that choosing a mode is a vital component in delivering the message. It is vital because it facilitates the transfer of the message from the performer and his music to the audience. As discussed previously, musician-audience communication is fundamental to keeping worship music sacred. Without a mode that represents the listener, the message is potentially meaningless.

Carlos Whittaker explains that the more precisely tuned the mode is to the type of audience, the better reaction one will receive from the audience and a worship leader will become "more effective" because of it. Whittaker knows when he is being effective in his selection of mode when he sees the reaction in his audience. He says that you must "know your audience and know why they are reacting in the way that they are" and a worship leader will be "one hundred times more effective" if they know why certain reactions are elicited. Choosing the right mode is important because "each band has their own unique voice that speaks best to their own community".

At the end of the Red Chair Event, Jeremy Camp encouraged people to carry people towards "the goal of Jesus, and honoring God through words. The best thing you can do is share

God's word. God's word is true." All three of them then got up and left to perform for The Worship Tour.

While observing the pits at these concerts I noticed something that was very different from the average concert pit—there was no dancing. The extent to which a pit member danced was and raising their arms in a v-shape above the head and the occasional clapping in unison. Why would this be the case? It would seem that at least one young teenage person at a rock concert would be infused with the excitement of the experience to, at the very least, jump up and down to the beat of the music. And why are the older audience members not swaying to the soothing melody of Jeremy Camp's "I Still Believe"?

Altogether, I interviewed 26 Christians at the University Lutheran Church of the Epiphany about dancing. Based on their responses I was able to categorize their feelings towards dancing into three groups; those who believe (1) dancing is sinful, (2) dancing is not sinful, and (3) dancing is not sinful unless it leads one to sin. Of those interviewed, 5 people believed dancing was sinful, 2 people thought dancing was not sinful, and 19 people agreed that dancing was not inherently sinful unless it lead one to sinful acts or lead someone else to sin. Despite the overwhelming majority believing that dancing was not inherently sinful, there was still no dancing at these events.

When having a conversation with a parent of a girl at "The Reinvention Tour" about why his daughter didn't dance he said "Dancing is a sin. Period... Dancing isn't that fun unless you know how to dance like [someone at a club]. And no daughter of mine is going to dance like [someone at a club]." This attitude mostly likely arose from the stigma attached to clubs being "hyper-sexualized" and associated with the drug scene (Brewster & Broughton 1999, 371).

Much like the mode and message of music, the body has its own mode and message. If musical mode performs the message of worship, then dance performs the message of sexual pleasure (Whiteley 1997).

## CONCLUSION

The contemporary Christian musician as a profession is the direct consequence of our modern economy (Klatt 1987, Raynor 1972, Weber 2009). In this profession, the use of religion to facilitate the accumulation of wealth coincides with the naturalized way of life in a modern capitalist society (Carrette & King 2005, Moore 1994). Gaining wealth in this way is seen as a blessing from God, not a method for greed (Weber 2008, 146).

Religion has become a tool for the contemporary Christian to harness his skills and abilities to be a proficient and successful musician. He interprets his need for an exemplary performance through his vocational calling (Weber 2008, 145). His drive to play his instrument well, to practice until satisfactory, is a way to worship God (Scruton 1997). He understands skillful playing only as a means to honor God. To play unskillfully, or sloppy, is to dishonor God. Religious resources utilized by contemporary Christian musicians are harnessed to excel the technical development of the musician. He then takes the skills he's gained and plays with other musicians in a band.

This band's ultimate goal is to spread the word of God. Through the use of a variety of genres, contemporary Christian musicians are able to select the ideal mode in which to transmit the sacred message of God. The mode is merely a medium, albeit secular, and not profane (Brewster & Broughton 1999). In the eyes of the Christian musician, the mode can be virtually

anything, and in fact, should be whatever is necessary to reach the people in the audience.

Reaching another person through music is central to the Christian musician. Honoring God is a process only completed once the message has been delivered to another person. The goal is to share God with others.

In the process of sharing the religious message through music, the contemporary Christian musician is doing something quite profound: he is consciously attempting to change the church environment through music. Carlos Whittaker's concept of church "disturbance" is the fundamental model of this change. By performing contemporary modes of music in church the musician is, in a sense, forcing these contemporary ideas on the congregation, forging acceptance along the way. As these modes become accepted, religious musicians harness their religious resources to push their worship service out of the church and onto the stage.

At a rock concert devoid of any religious symbols, Christian bands like Superchick sing songs about overcoming life's obstacles and worshiping Jesus. They utilize the rock genre to the extreme to spread their sacred message. Ripped jeans, pink hair, and wailing guitars are all aspects of their rock mode. The musicians' understanding of the image they portray allows them to tweak their image accordingly. Adjusting their image to appeal to their demographic can boost listener numbers which boosts record sales which means more and more people are receiving the word of God.

This study could have benefited from focused time with a specific Christian band or band member. If I had the opportunity to spend a large amount of time on the road with a band, detailing every moment, I could bring much more to the table. There is much to be had from the data already gathered but I feel I could go much deeper with that kind of opportunity. Being able

to travel with a band on their tours, I would have unique access to “behind the scenes” conversations and gain insight into their song writing techniques.

If these musicians require divine inspiration to drive them to become competent musicians and talented performers, then so be it. They are spreading positive values and helping the youth cope with negative emotions. Does it matter if religion is the motivating force? Scholars of the music world might share different opinions. But contemporary Christian musicians are not affecting the evolution of music; they borrow from already existing ideas (Byrnside, Hamm & Nettle 1975).

The contemporary Christian music realm is both a fascinating and sociologically rich arena that deserves much more attention in regards to research. While there are plenty of books and articles out there about contemporary music and society there seems to be very little about contemporary *Christian* musicians. I hope this study will contribute to the understanding of their social actions.

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