

Jesus Music

The Story of the Jesus Movement and Evaluation of Its Musical Impact

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### Abstract

Few recent historical developments have had as much impact on American Evangelical Christianity as the Jesus Movement. Dating back only a few decades, this movement resulted in the conversion of many countercultural youth and the consequent revitalization of many American churches. One of the greatest impacts of the Jesus Movement was its new music which came to be known as “Jesus Music.”

This thesis describes the history of the Jesus Movement and the musical impact it had on American Evangelical Christianity.

### Jesus Music: The Story of the Jesus Movement and Evaluation of Its Musical Impact

This paper tells the story of the Jesus Movement and evaluates its musical impact. It focuses on the time period from the beginning of the movement in 1967 to Explo '72, the event that signaled widespread recognition and acceptance of the movement. More specifically, this paper deals with the events of the Jesus Movement in California as these tended to be the most significant both historically and musically; and it examines the new musical expressions resulting from this movement.

The Jesus Movement was inextricably linked with “Jesus Music” from the start. Larry Eskridge, in his doctoral thesis “God’s Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America, 1966-1977,” wrote:

From the beginnings of the Jesus People Movement, music was an integral part of its very soul; indeed, it is hard to imagine there having been a “Jesus Movement” had there not been “Jesus Music.” Whether a home Bible study, a worship gathering of a commune or local “fellowship,” the Friday night programme at a coffeehouse, or an outdoor festival attracting thousands, “Jesus Music” was a prominent—and frequently the central—activity.<sup>1</sup>

One significant reason the Jesus Movement played such an influential role in forming new Christian music is that many of the early Jesus Music artists were converted to Christianity as a result of this revival. These artists, many of who had been secular musicians before their conversions, saw no reason why they should stop playing music. At the same time, tens of thousands of young, new Christians began looking for a “sanctified” version of their favorite musical style. One defining characteristic of many of the “Jesus People” was their belief that music had no inherent morality. As a result, they

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1. Larry Eskridge, *God's Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America, 1966-1977* (Stirling, Scotland: University of Stirling, 2005), 254.

were able to appropriate the popular musical styles of their times without theological qualms.<sup>2</sup>

### **America and the Youth Culture Prior to the Jesus Movement**

After World War Two American demographics changed significantly. The birth rate rose from 1.5 million a year in 1940 to 4 million a year in the 1950s, in what Larry Eskridge terms "...a long-term orgy of baby-making."<sup>3</sup> More than 76 million children—fully 40% of the population—would be born between 1946 and 1964.

Besides growing in numbers American youth were changing in how they interacted with society. Eskridge elaborated: "By the postwar period it was clear that American young people increasingly inhabited a specialized world of their own, marked off from the concerns, preoccupations and—increasingly, the control—of their elders."<sup>4</sup> Several reasons for this were thought to be the homogenizing effect of high school, the increased economic influence of the youth, and the sudden focus of advertisers on the young.

The homogenizing effect of high school came about because of the institution of child labor laws and population drift toward urban areas. By the 1960s more than 90% of working-class American youth were in high school, up 40% from the 1930s. This gave kids from different classes, races, and ethnicities a common shared experience, enabling them to relate to each other.<sup>5</sup>

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2. John Makujina, *Measuring the Music: Another Look at the Contemporary Christian Music Debate* (Salem, OH: Schmul Publishing Co, 2000), 90.

3. Eskridge, 40.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., 41-42.

The bullish American economy resulted in the increased economic influence of the young. Parents were making more money and passing it along to their children. By 1956 the average American teenager had a weekly income of \$10—the disposable income of an average family in the late 1930s.<sup>6</sup>

Because American teenagers were spending approximately \$22 billion a year by 1963, advertisers rushed to tap into this rapidly growing market. Marketing to youth as well as “selling” youth itself, American advertisers soon discovered “...it was ‘peers, not parents’ that proved most influential in shaping the attitudes, values and behavior of young American adolescents.”<sup>7</sup>

The repercussions of this new youth culture would prove significant for the Jesus Movement. The importance of what their peers thought and said would be very important for youth in the Jesus Movement. In that movement, many former hippies would evangelize among their former comrades, already having gained trust through their status as a member of the same generation.

### **American Christianity Prior to the Jesus Movement**

The 1950s and early 1960s were deceptively peaceful years in the United States. On the surface, they were years of prosperity and happiness with the standard of living rapidly rising. These years seemed to serve as a validation of the “American Dream” and the increasingly materialistic society. Beneath the surface, though, were a number of

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6. Ibid., 42.

7. Ibid., 42-43.

tensions, including Civil Rights, Women's Rights, the Cold War and Communism, and American foreign policy—especially in Vietnam.<sup>8</sup>

Preston Shires thought that one of the main contributing causes of the hippie countercultural movement was the liberalization of the American church. He reported that this had become common as far back as the 1920s, at which point "...mainstream Christianity, because it exercised a free interpretation of both doctrine and the Bible—free, that is, in the minds of its protagonists, from obscurantist traditions—had become known as liberalism."<sup>9</sup> This liberal Christianity was formed at least in part to synthesize the apparently contradictory beliefs of religion and modern science. Shires related:

What was, in practice, this message that allowed for both modern science and spirituality? According to liberal doctrine, an individual could believe in and engage a God who touched the soul, but he or she could not easily believe in and engage a God who miraculously parted the Red Sea or multiplied bread and fishes. In liberalism, these biblical stories had to be reinterpreted according to the tenets of scientism.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, liberal Christians believed the "highest moral principle" of Christianity was love: "Jesus Christ, liberals pointed out, came into the world as a testimony of love, and even if he did not do all the things the Bible claimed he did, he was still, at the very least, a symbol of perfect love."<sup>11</sup> These liberal Christians also did not believe in the need for a conversion experience, because they did not believe man was inherently evil. They laid a heavy emphasis on tolerance, although this did not seem to carry over to their treatment of Fundamentalists, Conservatives, and those over the age of

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8. Ibid., 78.

9. Preston Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2007), 12.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

40. Preston Shires believed that liberal Christianity increasingly and unknowingly isolated itself from the youth because it provided an insufficient theology and worldview.<sup>12</sup>

On the other side of the coin was Fundamentalist Christianity which arose partly in reaction to liberalism. This movement placed a dual emphasis on a literal understanding of the Bible, and the doctrine of inerrancy which held that the Bible is without error.<sup>13</sup> These two pieces of doctrine stood in stark contrast to the often symbolic view of the Bible found in Liberal Christianity. Fundamentalists had also isolated themselves from the youth by the 1960s. This was not necessarily a matter of theology, but of perception. There were several reasons for this isolation. Fundamentalist Christianity as a whole had several areas that resulted in its isolation. The first of these was the perception, mostly felt by the youth, that Fundamentalists had failed to support the poor. A second was separatism: Many Fundamentalist churches, distrustful of both the intellectualism that had spawned liberal Christianity, and popular culture, had lost touch with the current culture and became increasingly marginalized as a result. Finally, some high profile Fundamentalists had publically aligned themselves with Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy's anticommunist "witch hunts" and also segregation, deemed by Bob Jones Sr. "...as sanctified by God."<sup>14</sup> Although these individuals did not represent the views of all Fundamentalists many American youth regarded Fundamentalists as judgmental, rabidly anticommunist, and worst of all, racist. The

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12. Ibid.

13. Howard C. Kee et al., *Christianity: A Social and Cultural History* (Ann Arbor: Prentice Hall, 1998), 484.

14. Ibid., 42.



negative public perception of Fundamentalist Christians would not significantly change until the positive media coverage of the Jesus Movement.

This is not to say, of course, that Fundamental Christianity was irrelevant during the early to mid twentieth century. Far from it. Many evangelical organizations were successfully reaching out to youth and adults. These included Youth for Christ, with representative Billy Graham and clubs in almost 2,000 different American high schools; Young Life, founded by Jim “it’s a sin to bore a kid” Rayburn; the Fellowship of Christian Athletes with chapters in over one thousand high schools; the Navigators; and Campus Crusade for Christ.<sup>15</sup> This last group in particular would play an important role once the Jesus Movement got underway.

### **The Jesus Movement: The Hippie Precursors**

The Jesus Movement began once Christian evangelists reached out to hippies, some of whom converted to Christianity. A *Times* compilation described hippies as “...predominantly white, middle-class, educated youths ranging in age from 17 to 25 (though some as old as 50 can be spotted)...they are dropouts from a way of life that to them seems wholly oriented toward work, status and power.”<sup>16</sup> It goes on to say they were “anti-intellectual [and] distrustful of logic” and emphasized the use of mind-altering hallucinogenics and casual sex.<sup>17</sup> James T. Patterson says hippies “...sought freedom from authority, escape from conventional middle-class conventions, and satisfaction from

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15. Eskridge, 37-39.

16. Joe David Brown, “The Flower Children,” in *The Hippies*, ed. Joe David Brown (New York: Time Incorporated, 1967), 4.

17. *Ibid.*, 5-6.

levels of personal intimacy that they despaired of finding in mainstream society.”<sup>18</sup> The *Times* compilation also claimed a key element of the hippie movement was love—“Genuine hippies are overflowing with love—indiscriminate and all-embracing, fluid and changeable, directed at friend and foe alike.”<sup>19</sup> Foes they apparently had in plenty, at least according to the same *Times* story:

Few ordinary people can view hippies so dispassionately. Tradition-minded citizens, in particular, who cherish the fabric of the U.S., who take pride in its freedom and strength and who believe in its future, are hard put not to be contemptuous of these apparently idle parasites, who exist in fact because of the people they so roundly condemn.<sup>20</sup>

Patterson had a somewhat less passionate take on the reception of hippies by the American public: “‘Long-haired hippies,’ while irritating to many Americans, aroused less backlash than did young radicals who resisted the draft and otherwise impugned the symbols of American patriotism.”<sup>21</sup> Billy Graham may have captured the common national sentiment towards hippies when he said he would like to “shave them, cut their hair, bathe them and then preach to them.”<sup>22</sup> The appearance of the hippies certainly did not endear them to the American public:

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18. James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1996), 670.

19. Phillip Mandelkorn, “Evolution of the Hippie,” in *The Hippies*, ed. Joe David Brown (New York: Time Incorporated, 1967), 15.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Patterson, 670.

22. “Graham Seeks Out Youth in Crusades,” *Madison State Journal* (30 September 1967), Collection 360: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA)-Scrapbooks, reel 31 (January 1967-July 1968), Billy Graham Center Archives, Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL, quoted in Eskridge, 83.

Ronald Reagan described the typical hippie as someone who “dresses like Tarzan, has hair like Jane, and smells like Cheetah.”<sup>23</sup>

The “official” start of the hippie movement is held by some to have been the “Human Be-In” in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco on January 14, 1967. Nearly 20,000 people came to the park to listen to local bands, eat free food, and partake of the LSD being handed out. This event was organized by the Diggers, an anarchist group, who supposedly consulted astrologers “...on the best date for holding a public festival.”<sup>24</sup> There was no schedule or theme for this event; it was just a time when people could gather together. This event quickly attained national media coverage, and established San Francisco as the city to be in 1967. Thousands of young people soon began heading for San Francisco.

Initially, the newcomers to Haight-Ashbury found what appeared to be a hippie utopia. Eskridge stated:

A regular series of free “Be-Ins” and rock concerts, “chalk-ins” for sidewalk art, “clean-ins” and street sweeping fostered a strong sense of community and participation. In addition, crash pads, food co-ops and more-or-less formally organized “services” such as Neighborhood Legal Assistance, Job Co-op and the Haight-Ashbury Settlement House and Free Medical Center provided a basic safety-net and resources for the hip community.<sup>25</sup>

Adding to this impression were droves of stores that catered to hippies, like the Chickie P. Garbanzo Bead and Storm Door Company or the Weed Patch, as well as a newspaper and even a radio station. Despite the innovative new stores and strong sense of

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23. Patterson, 670.

24. Ibid., 77.

25. Ibid., 78.

community, the idealized vision of Haight-Ashbury would soon fail, creating a major opportunity for the Jesus Movement.

There were several immediate reasons why the peaceful hippie district of Haight-Ashbury soon imploded and created room for the Jesus Movement. A major one was overcrowding. Somewhere between 75,000 and 100,000 penniless young people immigrated to San Francisco in 1967, totally overwhelming the hippie district and the social services of the city. Food quickly ran low, especially since many of the hippies relied on charitable groups handing it out. Venereal diseases were extremely common as a result of the “free love” approach taken by the hippies; unfortunately, there were few “free health” medical practitioners in the city and the Free Clinic was soon overwhelmed. Another issue was a worrying degradation of young women:

“As one young teenage girl named Alice told early Jesus People figure David Hoyt, ‘girls didn’t have any trouble finding a place to spend the night’ if they were willing to pay the right price....In general, women in the Haight were at risk of all sorts of emotional and physical violence from their male counterparts.”<sup>26</sup>

A final factor in the collapse of the idealistic hippie movement was the drug trade. Drugs were a huge part of being a hippie: “In an early survey of the 1967 hippie scene sociologist Lewis Yablonsky found that drugs were the single strongest factor binding the people in his survey sample together—over 90% had used marijuana and nearly 70% had tried LSD.”<sup>27</sup> There were also increasing incidences of robberies to support drug

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26. Ibid., 81.

27. Lewis Yablonsky, *The Hippie Trip: A Firsthand Account of the Beliefs and Behaviours of Hippies in America by a Noted Sociologist* (New York: Pegasus, 1968), 22, quoted in Eskridge, 73.

addictions and violence over control over the drug trade. As the hippie population expanded, the quality of the drugs dropped.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Jesus Movement: Beginnings**

It was in response to these problems that Ted Wise and John MacDonald opened the “Living Room” coffeehouse in Haight-Ashbury, the action that many consider to be the official start of the Jesus Movement.

Ted Wise and John MacDonald were unlikely partners for ministry: MacDonald was a middle-aged Baptist pastor, in charge of a 200 person church in Mill Valley, California, while Ted Wise was a younger man who had undergone a dramatic conversion to Christianity from a life of drugs and domestic abuse.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, this would soon prove to be a popular format for ministry in the Jesus Movement: An older, experienced pastor would often team up with a younger convert who understood the hippies well enough to fit in and effectively evangelize. Another well-known duo to use this approach was Chuck Smith and Lonnie Frisbee.

In the spring of 1967 Wise became aware of the poor living conditions and spiritual needs in the Haight-Ashbury district. Convinced this was a great opportunity to show Christian love, he invited MacDonald to walk with him through San Francisco and persuaded him of the need for a ministry outreach. MacDonald assembled a small group of colleagues and friends who were interested in helping with this project. They called themselves Evangelical Concerns, Inc. and began raising money for a ministry center in the Haight. By the end of the summer they had enough money to lease a building about a

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28. Eskridge, 81.

29. Ibid., 85-86.

block away from the intersection of Haight and Ashbury streets. This became the “Living Room” coffeehouse in which hippies could relax, have some food, and talk to the staff about religion. Although the exact number is not known, it is estimated that about 20,000 people visited the Living Room during the two years it was open. Of these visitors, a significant percentage was successfully proselytized, although again, no statistical records exist.<sup>30</sup>

One of the most visible faces of the Jesus Movement would come from this coffeeshop. Only 17 years old at the time, Lonnie Frisbee was “High on acid and preaching on the sidewalks of the Haight about Jesus and flying saucers”<sup>31</sup> when the Wisers came across him. The group at the Living Room took Frisbee in hand, helped him quit drugs, and motivated him to study the Bible in a more orthodox fashion.<sup>32</sup> Lonnie Frisbee would later enter into ministry with Pastor Chuck Smith in Southern California.

At the time the hippie movement started, pastor Chuck Smith had little to no interest in the participants, other than “hippie watching” at Huntington beach. But as time went on his wife began to express a burden for the physical and spiritual needs of the hippies. Smith eventually began sharing her concerns and started thinking about how they could reach out to the hippies. While researching hippies, mostly by meeting acquaintances of his daughter, he met Lonnie Frisbee—“...a long-haired, bearded young man with bells on his feet and flowers in his hair. A real live hippie!”<sup>33</sup> Sensing something special about Frisbee, Chuck Smith invited him to stay in his home and

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30. *Ibid.*, 93-95.

31. Eskridge, 96.

32. *Ibid.*, 97.

33. *Ibid.*, 121.

evangelize the hippies of Huntington Beach. Frisbee agreed, and began bringing an ever-increasing crowd of barefoot, longhaired converts to Calvary Chapel. Chuck Smith quickly recognized the unique needs of these new congregants, many of them runaways: They needed food, housing, and an atmosphere without all their old temptations in which they could read the Bible and pray. Accordingly, Smith found a small house, got Calvary Chapel to pay part of the rent and living expenses, and put Frisbee, his wife and another hippie named John Higgins in charge. This small house had over 30 new hippie occupants within the first week, much to the annoyance of the suburban neighbors. The house got even more crowded once a "...runaway girl named Cherise was converted and by herself was responsible for bringing over 50 people to the house in a three-week period."<sup>34</sup> Calvary Chapel quickly opened a number of other communal houses in the region.

Many other Christian coffeehouses and halfway houses began opening up around this time, some of them experiencing considerable success. One was "His Place" on Sunset Strip, run by Arthur Blessitt, a Baptist minister from Mississippi. After "failing miserably" at a traditional approach to revival meetings, Blessitt immersed himself in the culture and style of the hippies. Initially ministering on the streets, Blessitt was able to raise enough money from Southern Baptist churches to rent a storefront. His Place, a combination of an "...old-style skid row mission and a psychedelic coffeehouse," served free Kool-Aid, day-old bagels and peanut butter sandwiches and had live music from the Eternal Rush house band.<sup>35</sup> This coffeehouse drew in a large number of people from the

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34. Ibid., 122.

35. Similarly, David Berg's daughter Linda once said "Teens for Christ had discovered the secret to gathering lost and wayward youth: free peanut butter sandwiches and live music."

sidewalk traffic; there were nights when there were over one thousand visitors to His Place.<sup>36</sup>

Another famous Christian coffeehouse at this time was the Salt Company, started by Don Williams. He was the new college pastor at First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood, hired by Christian Education Director Henrietta Mears shortly before her death. While reaching out to some of the counter cultural youth, Williams and his college group decided to start a coffeehouse. The Salt Company, as it was called, proved to be an immediate success, drawing hundreds of youth every week to the food and contemporary music. Often thought to be the “first major venue for a more upbeat style of Christian music aimed at youth”<sup>37</sup>, the Salt Company moved quickly from folk ‘hootenanny’ music to folk-rock. In 1969 they even had Jesus Music people give concerts in the sanctuary of Hollywood Presbyterian, drawing thousands of kids.

Larry Eskridge believed that the biggest impact of the Salt Company “...was in its role as a prototype for a countercultural-friendly manner of youth ministry. Beginning in 1969, numerous pastors, youth workers and concerned laypeople visited the Salt Company or corresponded with Williams to learn ‘how it was done.’”<sup>38</sup> During the 1970s, Williams once estimated there were at least 400 coffeehouses directly inspired by the Salt Company.<sup>39</sup> This represented a big step forward for Jesus Music, as hundreds of churches across America would use a more contemporary style to draw kids into

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36. Eskridge, 113.

37. Ibid., 258.

38. Ibid., 117.

39. Ibid.



coffeehouses. It was during this time that Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California underwent a dramatic transformation.

### **Calvary Chapel**

Originally a medium-sized independent charismatic church, the services at Calvary Chapel became full of "...young people sitting cross-legged in the aisles, forming impromptu prayer circles following services and greeting friends and visitors with warm embraces."<sup>40</sup> The music also gradually changed from traditional gospel, going to a folk style before ending up as folk-rock. This musical change was facilitated by the addition of an official band, Love Song. Besides Jesus, of course, the main draws were the persons of Chuck Smith and Lonnie Frisbee. The middle-aged, "avuncular" Smith soon became a father figure to the new members, "Papa Chuck" to the street kids, many of them runaways. Chuck Smith fell into the role of preaching the Bible, mentoring the youth, and monitoring Frisbee. In the early days of the Jesus Movement, Lonnie Frisbee proved invaluable at getting hippies to come to Calvary Chapel. Oden Fong, an eyewitness to these early days, said of Frisbee:

"...just because of his personality anywhere he'd go he would draw people like he was a pied piper." Yet Fong could not quite put a finger on what it was about Frisbee in front of an audience that was such a draw, noting that it certainly was not his expertise that intrigued people: "I don't think he knew the Bible all that well" he remembers, and "He was a horrible worship leader...he was awful...You couldn't really explain if you sat around and tried to look through his merits...except that he had so much boldness and conviction...his message was very simple."<sup>41</sup>

Don Williams had similar recollections of Frisbee:

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40. Ibid., 124.

41. Ibid., 125-126.

Recalling his first-ever visit to Calvary Chapel sometime in 1969 he vividly remembered that Frisbee “had trouble reading the Scriptures, he stumbled all over the words—he was reading out of the King James Version...he just slaughtered the text. He then started to preach from it and he woefully misinterpreted [the passage].” But to Williams’ surprise “[Frisbee] went on to preach one of the best evangelistic sermons” he had ever heard.<sup>42</sup>

Even Kent Philpott, a member of the Living Room, was impressed by Frisbee. He initially had some doubts: “We didn’t feel real strongly about Frisbee,” recalled Philpott, “...he was a weak personality...I had never even heard him speak to a group because he was a nobody, he would never [have been] entrusted [even] to lead a Bible study [back in San Francisco].”<sup>43</sup> After hearing Frisbee speak, though, Philpott was astounded:

...it was amazing to see Lonnie Frisbee in action, you have no idea, he attracted hundreds if not thousands of kids...he looked like a picture of Jesus, he had the hair, the beard...here was an authentic hippie kid, when he got up to talk, I don’t know to use the word mesmerizing, or hypnotic, or whether it was just the Holy Spirit. I don’t think I’ve ever seen that kind of power before...it was incredible...<sup>44</sup>

Part of the reason for the success of Frisbee’s ministry is thought to be the Pentecostal/Charismatic elements he introduced into the church, including “...speaking in tongues and being ‘slain in the Spirit.’”<sup>45</sup> Chuck Smith had grown up in a Pentecostal church, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, and was familiar with these elements. He was also familiar with, and wary of, Pentecostal excesses, and proved a

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42. Ibid., 125.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid.

restraining influence on Frisbee: “Indeed, he was perceived by more than one observer to be ‘keeping the lid down’ on Frisbee’s penchant for boisterous charisma.”<sup>46</sup>

### **Jesus Music**

Initially, the music at Calvary Chapel was strangely unremarkable. Strangely, because it would seem that the ministry to hippies would be even more effective if music they could relate to was used. John Higgins, part of the leadership team for the first communal house, said the music was “‘...out of the hymn books and it wasn’t something that made you just leave and go into another world.’ In fact Higgins found the music ‘rather boring’ and admitted that he ‘came late sometimes just to avoid the music.’”<sup>47</sup> The first place more contemporary music showed up was in the communal houses funded by Calvary Chapel, where recent converts were continually writing new songs with Christian lyrics. But different elements were introduced to the Calvary Chapel worship service in 1968 with the addition of acoustic guitars and new songs.

It was not until 1969, though, that a musical breakthrough occurred at Calvary Chapel. This was the year that the band Love Song arrived in Pasadena. The band had been on a spiritual journey for two years, trying various Eastern religions and going so far as to move to Hawaii and meditate. They would find nothing satisfying until they made their way to Calvary Chapel. As the leader of the group, Chuck Girard, related:

We were having a Bible study one night. We got in an argument...about tongues. We had no idea that was controversial. And we knew that there were a bunch of hippies that took over a whole hotel complex called the Blue Top at Newport Beach and they made a commune out of it....We

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46. Ibid., 127.

47. Ibid., 260.

knew they were more Christian than we were. So we said, 'Let's go talk about this stuff in the Bible.' And we were all stoned.<sup>48</sup>

The hippie commune invited the band to come with them to Calvary Chapel. Girard remembered, although disappointed that Smith and not Frisbee was teaching, he was impressed by the preaching and impacted by the sincerity of the singing. The whole band was soon saved and baptized, and began rewriting Christian lyrics to their songs. About a month later, they asked Chuck Smith to listen to some of their new songs. Smith "...broke down in tears, telling the band, in the memory of lead guitarist Tommy Coomes, he had 'been praying for something like this for a year.'"<sup>49</sup> From that day on Love Song played regularly at the Wednesday night Bible study and Smith and Frisbee also gave other bands chances to lead worship at Calvary Chapel. These other bands consisted of converted rock 'n' rollers and musical church youth, who combined to form bands. Some of the names included Children of the Day, Good News, Selah, and Mustard Seed Faith.

Seeing how young people responded to and identified with music, Smith and Frisbee eventually decided they should put on concerts to reach out to people. The first concert took place in early 1970, and was a huge success. The shows were routinely packed out, but even more important to Smith and Frisbee, were evangelistic successes. 600 youth were said to have accepted Christ at the end of one Love Song concert.<sup>50</sup> These concerts soon became standard at Calvary Chapel, inspiring other churches to host

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48. David W. Stowe, *No Sympathy for the Devil: Christian Pop Music and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 28.

49. Eskridge, 262.

50. *Ibid.*, 263.

concerts of their own. This form of musical evangelism would also be used in what many consider to be the culminating event of the Jesus Movement, Explo '72.

### **EXPLO '72—"The Christian Woodstock"**

Explo '72,<sup>51</sup> also referred to as "Godstock," was the idea of Bill Bright, the founder of CCC. His vision was

a gathering of 100,000—the majority being college students—who would be equipped with basic evangelistic training and who would then return to their homes and train five other people in what was termed "Operation Penetration." Through these new cell groups Bright hoped to have an army of half a million local lay evangelists who would evangelize America by 1976 and promote the evangelization of the world by 1980.<sup>52</sup>

A huge amount of planning went into Explo '72, officially starting in August 1970. CCC staff member Paul Esheman was in charge, with 14 staff members and a budget of \$2,400,000.<sup>53</sup> The final budget would end up being almost \$3,000,000.<sup>54</sup> The event would be held in Dallas, Texas. It was a resounding success, with 80,000 "delegates" learning about evangelism in the four days of workshops. On the last day, 180,000 showed up at the all-day concert featuring Johnny Cash, Larry Norman, Kris Kistofferson and many others. One of the most notable characteristics of this event was the merging of the Jesus Movement with the evangelical subculture. Arranged by Campus Crusade for Christ, an evangelical organization, the event featured the evangelical Billy Graham as the primary speaker alongside Jesus Movement musicians Larry Norman, Love Song, and Barry McGuire. Important evangelical figures also felt

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51. Short for "Explosion."

52. Eskridge, 235.

53. *Ibid.*, 236.

54. Stowe, 60.

connected with the younger generation: “‘Though their music was not my kind of music,’ wrote John F. Taylor, executive director of Wheaton College’s Alumni Association, ‘I fell in love with these beautiful kids. I can see a brighter tomorrow because of them.’”<sup>55</sup>

Despite being targeted at college students, the event was almost overtaken by high school students. Three times the expected number of high schoolers—40,000—showed up at Expo ’72, indicating the interest of the younger generation. Writing about the significance of Explo ’72, Eskridge claimed:

It would prove to be the single most important event ever associated with the Jesus people movement, serving as a unifying, emboldening occasion for those youth who had participated, a vindication of evangelical leaders’ backing of the Jesus People movement and an encouragement to many in the older generation about the direction and potential of American youth. EXPLO proved beyond a doubt that the Jesus People movement had become an integral part of the American landscape, and, particularly, the evangelical subculture.<sup>56</sup>

The Jesus Movement was no longer just a counter-countercultural reaction among hippies. It now encompassed many less-rebellious church youth who also identified with it. As one unknown journalist wrote:

Most recently the movement has built along solid middle-class lines. Waiting in the wings was a sizeable corps of Sunday School regulars, raised by devout Protestants to obey authority and honor America, whose fundamentalist faith previously earned them more embarrassment than respect from their peers. When some of the hippest elements started embracing that faith, these more conventional Jesus people emerged proudly from their relative obscurity to join the cause, becoming as a class the most numerous segment of the new spiritual enthusiasts.<sup>57</sup>

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55. Eskridge, 243.

56. *Ibid.*, 245.

57. *Ibid.*, 246.

These new members of the Jesus People would provide a much larger market for the new Jesus Music, as shown by the additional 100,000 who showed up at Explo '72 on the day of the concert. They supported the growth of multi-day "Jesus Festivals" like "Jesus '75" and "Maranatha!/Calvary Chapel Nights" in which multiple musical acts would perform and sell merchandise.<sup>58</sup>

### **Evaluation of the Impact of the Jesus Movement on Music**

The Jesus Movement had a lasting impact on American music because it was made up of tens of thousands of youth, on fire for God, evangelizing as much as they could and looking for music they could relate to. The 1971 *Time* cover story on the Jesus Movement announced "Music, the lingua franca of the young...[is the] special medium of the Jesus movement."<sup>59</sup> Similarly, sociologist Richard Ellwood wrote in 1973

The ability of Jesus rock and gospel melodies to generate rich, powerful feelings in a mood- and emotion-oriented age has brought and held the movement together....It is largely music that has made the movement a part of pop culture, and it is the Jesus movement as pop culture that distinguishes it from what is going on in the churches.<sup>60</sup>

While tens of thousands of young people were converting to Christianity from the counter-cultural hippie movement, they did not seem to fit in many churches as they still looked like hippies. R.M. Enroth wrote in *The Story of the Jesus People: A Factual Survey*: "Fundamentalists will be confused because the Jesus people say the right things in the wrong language. Besides, they are long-haired, hippie-looking, and alienated from the established churches. Theologically, the Jesus People are fundamentalists,

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58. Ibid., 291.

59. "The New Rebel Cry: Jesus Is Coming!," *Time*, 57(21 June 1971), 61.

60. Richard S. Ellwood, *One Way: The Jesus Movement and its Meaning* (Eaglewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 163.

sociologically, they are not.”<sup>61</sup> Peter Ward added the observation that many of the elements of the hippie culture were incorporated into that of the Jesus Movement. He stated, “The Jesus Movement was significant because it linked evangelism with the style, behaviours, music and values of the hippie movement.”<sup>62</sup> In other words, although conversion drastically changed those people, it did not change many of their core beliefs, tastes or behaviors; in fact, many were reinforced. Musicians who were converted to Christianity saw no reason why they had to stop playing rock or folk music simply because they were Christian. They instead saw it as an opportunity to evangelize.

This multitude of new believers would create a steady market for fledgling Jesus Music artists. In *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*, Colleen McDannell wrote that the Jesus People saw Christianity as a lifestyle. Since they wanted every aspect of their lives to reflect their relationship with Christ, they wanted to surround themselves with music that affirmed their beliefs.<sup>63</sup>

This desire really began to be achievable in 1971 with the release of an album from Calvary Chapel. Chuck Smith, amazed at how the new music had impacted his ministry, privately funded a compilation album of the best Calvary Chapel bands. Including Love Song, Children of the Day, Country Faith, and four other groups, the album was called *The Everlastin’ Living Jesus Music Concert*. This was an “adequately-engineered” album that sold like hotcakes. Available for purchase at concerts and through

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61. Ronald M. Enroth, Edward E. Ericson and C. Breckinridge Peters, *The Story of the Jesus People: A Factual Survey* (Paternoster, 1972), 17.

62. Peter Ward, *Selling Worship: How What We Sing Has Changed the Church* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2005), 37.

63. Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 247.



mail order, the Christian youth all over the country bought them and listened to them over and over. The success of this album caused Chuck Smith to form Maranatha! Music that same year, a label that would release almost 40 Christian albums during the 1970s.<sup>64</sup>

Another album that was heavily influenced by Calvary Chapel was *Love Song*, a self-titled album recorded by the band Love Song. Competently recorded and produced, this album was “...overwhelmingly cited as the single “most influential” Jesus Music album by nearly a four to one margin over its next closest competitors.”<sup>65</sup> It sold around 250,000 copies, extremely impressive numbers considering a gospel song was considered a major hit when it sold 75,000 copies. Interestingly, the title track from *Love Song* reached the top of the charts in the Philippines.<sup>66</sup> *Love Song* would significantly raise the bar for Jesus Music.

Ideologically, many of the Jesus People were separated from those in traditional evangelical and fundamental churches by their belief that music was ethically neutral; that it had no inherent morality. This view, which seems to be largely accepted in many evangelical circles today, was expressed in the “Christian Rocker’s Creed”:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all music was created equal—that no instrument or style of music is in itself evil—that the diversity of musical expression which flows forth from man is but one evidence of the boundless creativity of our Heavenly Father.<sup>67</sup>

This view was opposed by many in the church, and those who were against the new Christian style of music were often quite vocal. Bob Larson, a well-known preacher, said,

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64. Eskridge, 264.

65. Ibid., 271.

66. Ibid., 269.

67. Makujina, 84.

“I maintain that the use of Christian rock is a blatant compromise so obvious that only those who are spiritually blind by carnality can accept it.”<sup>68</sup> Historian Paul Baker gave a counter argument: “The main support for the anti-rock preachers came from adults and parents who disliked rock and roll in the first place, and the anti-rock music books and lectures gave them what they believed to be a biblical foundation for the abhorrence of all rock music, including Jesus music.”<sup>69</sup>

Dwight Ozard, editor of *Prism* magazine, had an interesting theory on why there was such intense dislike of rock music in Christian circles:

As [contemporary Christian music] began to grow, we were bombarded with assaults from pastors and lecturers who were intent on showing CCM’s evil, “pagan” (read: “jungle”) roots. This debate...if nothing else, serves to illustrate just how much vestigial racism remained in its [the Church’s] underbelly, with most of the arguments against “Christian rock” centering on the question of the “beat” and its alleged demonic and pagan roots...We were told that rock was “race music.”<sup>70</sup>

The Jesus People held firm on the ethical neutrality of music, though, and over time their view has appeared to prevail in American Christianity. In fact, John Makujina wrote a book in 2000 that bemoans the fact that this issue has been settled in favor of the Jesus People, painting their views on music as reductionist.<sup>71</sup>

Part of what may have made Jesus Music so appealing to the younger generation, at least initially, was that it offered youth the opportunity for a little rebellion, much in

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68. Paul Baker, *Contemporary Christian Music: Where It Came From, What It Is, Where It's Going* (Westchester: Crossway Books, 1985), 79.

69. Ibid.

70. Dwight Ozard, “The Seven Deadly Sins of Contemporary Christian Music,” in *More Like The Master*, ed. Patrick Peterson and Jane Hertenstein (Chicago, IL: Cornerstone Press, 1996), 12.

71. Makujina, 90.

the same way the Jesus Movement did. Thom Granger, a member of the Calvary Chapel music scene, said:

In my own suburban, baby boomer way, this was my big rebellion. Because I wasn't from a Christian home. My dad, he wasn't an atheist, but he was an agnostic and wasn't interested in going to church or organized religion. So in a way it was the perfect rebellion. Because I was not only able at seventeen—which is when you are probably the biggest brat you can ever be to your parents—not only was I able to stand up to him, but I had the authority of God, supposedly.<sup>72</sup>

Granger reiterated later on, adding:

This was definitely my little rebellion, in a funny kind of way. Despite the positivity of all that, there was for certain of us a sense of rebellion about it. And it was personal. “This is not going to be about mom and dad, this is not going to be about anybody. This is my choice, my life.” This was probably the biggest decision on my own in my life at that time.<sup>73</sup>

This tinge of rebellion carried on over into Jesus Music, especially once adults began denouncing it. This gave Christian teens something which while fully consistent with their theology and worldview, let them feel as if they were rebelling against something. This may have influenced the popularity of Jesus Music, and the passion with which its supporters would defend it.

### **Praise Songs and the Jesus Movement**

A noteworthy musical impact of the Jesus Movement was the popularization of praise songs. These praise songs tended to be short choruses that were usually about attributes of God:<sup>74</sup>

[They were] an amalgamation of simple scripture songs and choruses that derived much of their inspiration from the “Singing in the Spirit”

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72. Stowe, 12-13.

73. Ibid., 13-14.

74. Don Williams, “Charismatic Worship,” in *Exploring the Worship Spectrum: 6 Views*, ed. Paul A. Basden (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 142.

phenomenon associated with the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement and were aimed primarily at creating a corporate worship experience rather than being a stand-alone performance piece.<sup>75</sup>

Calvary Chapel was instrumental in generating and spreading praise songs, especially after the formation of Maranatha! Music. Don Williams, then the college pastor at the First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood, wrote of his first experience with praise songs at Calvary Chapel:

As Lonnie Frisbee, a young, long-haired evangelist led in worship, the crowd opened their Bibles to the book of Psalms and sang through several passages, accompanied by the rock band Love Song. As a traditional Presbyterian minister, I was jolted. Something new was up and, in retrospect, much of the worship in the Western world would never be the same.<sup>76</sup>

While Calvary Chapel and Maranatha! Music contributed heavily to the rise of the praise song in the early 1970s, their influence grew considerably in the late 1970s. Dr. Vernon Whaley, professor at Liberty University, described what brought about the change:

In 1978, Maranatha Music in Costa Mesa, California made two strategic decisions that had major impact on evangelical worship. First, they closed down their operation as a non-profit producer of Jesus Music and the new contemporary recording artist. Second, they started a new “for profit” company that specialized in the production of children’s music. Using Psalm 8:2 as a mission statement, they introduced to children a whole new genre of music called “scripture song” or “praise and worship.” They created a cartoon type character by the name of *Psalty* to teach children about hymns, scripture, doctrine, and the Christian disciplines. The idea behind the move was to use children as a means of teaching parents. It was an instant success and in the process, the parents began hearing and learning a whole new body of songs for evangelical worship.<sup>77</sup>

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75. Eskridge, 263.

76. Williams, 139.

77. Vernon M. Whaley, “The Baby Boomer Revival 1965-1985,” (2011), 56.

Although Calvary Chapel was influential in the spread of praise songs, these songs were being written and sung many other places. In fact, one of the first examples of a modern praise song album is *Scriptures in Song*, released in New Zealand by David and Dale Garrett.<sup>78</sup>

### **The Jesus Movement and the Contemporary Christian Music Industry**

Another significant result of the Jesus Movement was thousands of new Christians looking for music they could relate to, as well as creating it themselves. These new Christians provided a consumer and artistic base for the fledgling Jesus Music movement which was soon bolstered by young people already in the church. The growing consumer market drew in existing music companies like Benson and Word which had not hitherto been involved in the new Jesus Music. John Styll, founder of *Contemporary Christian Music* magazine, says: “With respect to [Christian] contemporary music, there was no publishing before 1970, because there was no [Christian] contemporary music to speak of.”<sup>79</sup> This soon changed, and Christian musicians began signing to Christian music companies and distributing through Christian bookstores, forming the beginnings of the Christian music industry.

### **Conclusion**

The Jesus Movement had a significant impact on American music. One reason for this was that the movement brought about an ideological shift in how many in the American church viewed music. Music, once viewed as possessing an inherent morality, began to be seen as ethically neutral apart from the lyrics. This new view was brought

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78. Donald P. Hustad, *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal* (Carol Stream: Hope Publishing Company, 1993), 285.

79. John Styll. Personal Interview by Vernon M. Whaley on January 10, 1992, 3.

into the church by the Jesus People, many of whom retained this belief in the face of opposition.

Another factor in the musical impact of the Jesus Movement was the musicians in the movement. These musicians wrote and played what soon came to be called “Jesus Music.” Some of these musicians would eventually build enough of a consumer base to attract the attention of music publishing companies and form the beginnings of the Christian music industry.

Finally, the Jesus Movement contributed to the popularity and use of the praise song. Played in settings ranging from Calvary Chapel to hippie communes, the praise song entered the consciousness of more and more Christians. This would lead to the rise of the Praise & Worship genre, a musical style that would change the worship styles of churches all across America.

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