

The Relationship Between the Christian Music Industry and Church Worship Music

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Abstract

Music has been used for millennia to worship God. Today the words *worship* and *music* are almost interchangeable in American Evangelical churches. Christian music has become a growing genre with its own radio stations, billboard charts and awards, and recording artists who exclusively sing Christian songs. Church music has also changed drastically in the past century. The musical portion of a church service used to consist of hymns led by a choir and music director who is accompanied by a piano or organ. Now many churches have a worship leader who plans and leads the musical portion of the church service. The contemporary service consists of a full praise band performing Contemporary Christian music with added lighting effects, video, and amplification through a sound system. These changes, both in popular Christian music and in church worship music, are intrinsically linked. The Christian music industry and church worship music have become interconnected – as the industry continues to change with its surrounding culture, church music changes with it. This thesis will explore the history of contemporary Christian music and its connection with the church.

The Relationship Between the Christian Music Industry and Church

Worship Music

Introduction

Music has been used to worship God since the beginning of time.¹ From the Psalms of the Bible, to the plainchant of the medieval church, to the hymns of the Reformation to the praise choruses of the twenty-first century, worship music² has changed considerably over the centuries. Today, not only is worship music experienced in churches, but it can also be heard on the radio, television, concert tours, or just about anywhere that secular music is heard. This growth of music with an explicitly Christian theme has led to Christian radio stations, recording artists who exclusively sing Christian songs, and ultimately an entire genre called “contemporary Christian music”³ – a genre classified by lyrics rather than musical style.⁴

Effect of Contemporary Christian Music on Church Worship

With the development of contemporary Christian music and the Christian music industry, church music has changed drastically. There is controversy in some churches over whether it is appropriate to worship God while accompanied by loud instruments associated with rock music, such as electric guitar, drums, bass guitar, and electronic

1. Job 38:4,7, *Holy Bible ESV*.

2. In this paper, the terms “worship music” or “Christian music” refers to the lyrics of the songs. The author takes the position that music itself is amoral, and cannot be classified as such.

3. In this paper, the term “contemporary Christian music” refers to songs with Christian lyrics set to a modern or rock music style.

4. Megan Livengood and Connie Ledoux, “Watering Down Christianity? An Examination of the Use of Theological Words in Christian Music,” *Journal of Media and Religion* 3, no. 2 (2004): 119-129.

keyboard. This controversy has certainly affected and even divided many churches.⁵ Since contemporary Christian music is easily available with virtually any technology, it has expanded the choices that a worship leader or pastor has when choosing songs for his congregation.

Some of the changes that have come with the growth of the Christian music industry have partially arisen with the simultaneous progress of technology. It has changed the job description of a worship leader in that a full band and several multimedia aspects are involved in many worship services now, whereas before contemporary Christian music, the worship leader simply chose songs out of a hymnal and directed it with a pianist or organist accompanying the congregation. In addition, with Christian radio stations, many congregants may hear a song for the first time on the radio, and then sing it in church the next Sunday, whereas before the development of Christian radio, a person would hear the song first in church.

Effect of Churches on Contemporary Christian Music

The relationship between the Christian music industry and the church is not one-sided, however. Not only does the Christian music industry affect church worship music, but the church continually affects the industry as well. The Christian music industry began with songwriters within the church sharing songs with the congregation, and today that is still the case. Many praise bands have also become successful music artists, and some larger churches even have their own recording label and studio. Because of Christian radio and the numerous ways that music can be distributed through the Internet,

5. Jay R. Howard, "Contemporary Christian Music: Where Rock Meets Religion," *The Journal of Popular Culture*, no. 26, (1992): 123-130.

the praise band of one church can write songs for their congregation, publish or record those songs, and other churches around the world can sing the same songs.

Introduction to the History of Contemporary Christian Music

There is no doubt that the development of contemporary Christian music and its industry has had these effects on the evangelical church and many more, and that in return, the church has had much to do with the success of the industry. The relationship between the Christian music industry and the church can be traced back to the contemporary Christian music that originated in the “Jesus Movement” revivals in the twentieth century.⁶ This thesis will examine the history of the Christian music industry and its relationship with the church from the Jesus Movement until today.

History of Contemporary Christian Music

The Jesus Movement

Before the Jesus Movement revival in the 1960s, most churches sang traditional hymns. This had been the tradition for hundreds of years, and while most adults were satisfied with the tried and true songs of the church, many in the younger generation were restless with the fact that church culture and the interests of their generation were so differentiated. In the secular music industry, rock music was popular, but in the church old hymns were sung.

By the late sixties, hippie culture was prevalent among young people. This culture was a rebellion against society, and was known for war protests, drug use, rock music, and free, “anything goes” lifestyles. The pinnacle of this movement occurred in 1969: the famed Woodstock festival. This three-day outdoor concert became infamous for drug use

6. Larry Eskridge, *God's Forever Family: The Jesus People Movement in America, 1966 – 1977* (London: Oxford University Press, 2013), ch. 8.

and illicit behavior.⁷ This growing people group was clearly without any influence of God or church, and would not be likely to set foot in or be accepted by a typical church at the time.⁸

This all changed when a few individuals decided to share the gospel with the hippies. Through ministries designed to reach radical liberals, Christian coffeehouses, and other outreaches, hippies began to accept Christ and preach the gospel everywhere. A revival was begun.⁹

Hippies who were recently saved began to evangelize their friends, and an unconventional group of Christians was formed. These new converts were different from the straight-laced, suit and tie-wearing churchgoers of the time. They kept much of the countercultural lifestyle that hippies were known for, yet rejected the sinful aspects.¹⁰ They came to church in blue jeans and bare feet, with long hair and simple attire.¹¹ Although they looked unusual, their conviction was genuine, and they were excited about their newfound faith.¹²

Chuck Smith. One of the most prominent ministries of the Jesus Movement was started by the pastor of Calvary Bible Chapel in Costa Mesa, CA. Chuck Smith decided to approach a group of hippies on the beach and preach the gospel. To his surprise, they

8. Fox News, "1969 Fast Facts: Woodstock," Fox News, July 19, 2009, accessed January 25, 2015, <http://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/2009/07/19/fast-facts-woodstock/>.

9. Elmer L. Towns and Vernon M. Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages: How the Great Awakenings Shape Evangelical Worship* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2012), 295.

10. Ibid, 298.

11. Ibid, 299.

12. Ibid, 300.

responded and one after another, began to repent and ask to be baptized in the ocean.¹³ He invited them to church, and not only did many of the hippies begin to attend church along with the conservative, suit-wearing churchgoers of the time, but they also started Bible studies throughout the week, zealous to know the word of God.¹⁴

Jesus Music

Since music was an important part of their culture, once they converted hippies began to write simple songs about their new love for God.¹⁵ They would play these songs for each other in church gatherings and Bible studies. As they sang for hours on end, Chuck Smith could see how meaningful these songs were to the hippies. The songs were different than traditional hymns in their simple lyrics, repetition, and guitar accompaniment. Sensing the need to preserve and distribute these songs that became known as “Jesus music,”¹⁶ Smith founded a record label known as “Maranatha! Music” in 1971. The label signed musicians who were passionate about their faith, and published the music to make it available to others.¹⁷

Explo '72. An event important to the Jesus movement was Explo '72, a six day gathering of both Christian and unsaved young people that included concerts by popular Jesus musicians, Bible study, and preaching by Billy Graham. Just three years after the famed Woodstock concerts, Explo '72 became known as “Godstock.” It was sponsored by Campus Crusade for Christ. Ironically, the president of this organization, Bill Bright,

13. Ibid, 299.

14. Ibid, 300.

15. Eskridge, ch. 8.

16. Towns and Whaley, 302.

17. Maranatha! Music, “About Maranatha! Music,” Maranatha! Music, accessed January 24, 2015, <https://www.maranathamusic.com/about/>.

had just one year before opposed Christian rock music. After Bright realized that he could better evangelize the youth of the nation if he embraced Christian rock, he decided to present Explo '72. The gathering had political agendas – a military presentation supporting Vietnam and campaigning for conservative President Nixon – but its focus was undeniably on God.¹⁸ Billy Graham and Bill Bright were popular among conservative Christians at the time, so their public alliance with Christian rock and roll musicians for Explo '72 was crucial to the traditional evangelical church's acceptance of contemporary Christian music.¹⁹

Popular Christian Bands

The father of Christian rock music. Larry Norman was another well-known pioneer of Jesus music, and unquestionably one of the best.²⁰ Known now as “the father of Christian rock music,”²¹ his first solo album “Upon This Rock” is considered to be the first Christian rock album.²² He received much criticism for his boldness in addressing sensitive themes in his songs, talking about issues such as racism and violence in a time when previous Christian music was mostly upbeat and inspirational.²³ Many of his songs such as “I Wish We’d All Been Ready” and “Why Don’t You Look Into Jesus” were

18. John G. Turner, “The Christian Woodstock,” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 18, 2008, accessed January 25, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB120062657590499869>.

19. Towns and Whaley, 303-304.

20. John J. Thompson, *Raised by Wolves: The Story of Christian Rock & Roll* (Toronto, Ont.: ECW Press, 2000), 51.

21. Towns and Whaley, 320.

22. John J. Thompson, 49.

23. *Ibid*, 49.

purposed for evangelism, a new concept for Christian music.²⁴ Eventually, frustrated by the fact that the Christian record labels frequently censored his songs, Norman started his own label. Because of his fame, it initially met with much success and launched several Christian musicians. After a few years, however, the label failed due to Norman's inadequate business skills. Still, by paving the way for Christian rock music and pushing the limits of Christian music creatively, Norman set the tone for the Christian music industry for decades to come.²⁵

Love Song. One of the first prominent Christian bands was Love Song.²⁶ The group of four men started out as a secular rock band in the 1960s, but after visiting Calvary Bible Chapel they became Christians. The group began singing in church services and writing Jesus music. Their first Christian album remained the top gospel album for more than a year²⁷ and has been called "the greatest Christian music album."²⁸ They also had the unique ministry of being able to play in public schools as part of an anti-drug movement. Despite their great success – and possibly because of it – Love Song voluntarily disbanded in the mid seventies, at the peak of their popularity.²⁹

24. Towns and Whaley, 321.

25. John J. Thompson, 52.

26. Towns and Whaley, 318.

27. Love Song, "Love Song: The History," Love Song, accessed January 24, 2015, <http://www.one-way.org/lovesong/history6.htm>.

28. Mike Rimmer, "Love Song: Chuck Girard Remembers His Days with the Pioneers of Christian Rock," Cross Rhythms, January 1, 2006, accessed January 24, 2015 http://www.crossrhythms.co.uk/articles/music/Love_Song__Chuck_Girard_remembers_his_days_with_the_pioneers_of_Christian_rock/24251/p1/.

29. Ibid.

Second Chapter of Acts. Another of the early Christian rock groups was Second Chapter of Acts. They began by reaching out to the hippie movement, but by the end of their career their audience included the evangelical culture as well.³⁰ Composed of three siblings, the band maintained success for almost two decades. Their music had less of a hard rock and roll and more of a pop sound than some of the Christian rock of the time, but their album “With Footnotes” is still thought of as one of the best Christian albums to date.³¹

Major Christian Record Labels

Maranatha. Maranatha! Music was the record label started by Chuck Smith in Calvary Chapel. Maranatha means “The Lord is coming.” It is one of the words used in the Bible in reference to worship, and the label soon became a leader in worship music.³² The company initially signed many of the musicians and songwriters that were coming to Calvary through the Jesus Movement, and several Christian records were published. However, in 1978, Chuck Fromm, one of the leaders of Maranatha! Music, became convicted that the record label had become more about Christian entertainment than worship. After meeting with the other leaders of the company, they announced a shift in focus to teaching people how to worship rather than entertainment or growing the industry. Maranatha! released all of their artists from their contract and started afresh publishing worship music directly to churches. This change had a direct impact on church

30. Towns and Whaley, 320.

31. John J. Thompson, 62.

32. Don Cusic, *The Sound of Light: A History of Gospel and Christian Music* (Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2002), 249.

worship that still resounds today. The company produced songs such as “Seek Ye First” and “I Love You, Lord” that are still used in many churches.³³

Word. Word Records was founded in 1951, well over a decade before the Jesus Movement began, but was profoundly influenced by the revival. It was founded by Jarrell F. McCracken and originally produced hymns and gospel music. It eventually became a publishing company as well.³⁴ When contemporary Christian groups became commercial in the 1970s, Word signed artists such as Petra and Love Song.³⁵ One of the most influential decisions of Word Records was the contract that McCracken signed with A&M in 1984 that would enable Word’s products to be sold in the secular field. The leverage behind this deal was young contemporary Christian artist Amy Grant, who was extremely popular in the world of Christian music. A&M wanted to endorse her in the secular world, as well. This decision was the start of many Christian record companies marketing their records to a wider audience.³⁶

Sparrow. Sparrow Records is a leading Christian record label that was started during the Jesus Movement. The company was founded by Billy Ray Hearn, who was working for Word Records when he had the idea to start a new label. He began Myrrh Records in 1972, which was made successful by Petra and Honeytree. He still had the desire to begin his own record label, without the management of Word Records, though. In 1976, he was given the chance to start Sparrow Records. The first artists to be signed

33. Towns and Whaley, 341-343.

34. Mike Callahan, David Edwards, and Patrice Eyries. “Word Records Story,” Word Records Story, March 27, 2001, accessed January 26, 2015, <http://www.bsnpubs.com/word/word/wordstory.html>.

35. Kim Jones, “The History of Sparrow Records,” About Entertainment, accessed January 26, 2015, <http://christianmusic.about.com/od/recordlabels/p/labelsparrow.htm>.

36. Callahan, Edwards, and Eyries.

by Sparrow included one of the former members of Second Chapter of Acts as well as Keith Green and John Michael Talbot. The label grew in success due to its popular artists, and after Hearn's son took over the company in 1995, a parent company, the EMI Christian Music Group, was founded. Today, EMI includes Sparrow Records, Forefront Records, EMI Gospel Records, Six Steps Records, and Worship Together. It is now owned by Universal Music Group, making it one of the leading companies in the music industry.³⁷ Some of Sparrow Records' artists include Amy Grant,³⁸ Josh Wilson,³⁹ and Britt Nicole.⁴⁰

Christian Radio

Christian radio stations began early in the twentieth century, but only broadcasted preaching and some gospel music. In 1928, sixty Christian radio stations were issued licenses, but just five years later, half of them had already failed. By 1980 there were only twelve Christian radio stations in existence. This was largely due to the demand for entertainment radio. But with the rise of contemporary Christian music, there was a new audience for Christian radio stations.

Audience. Originally, the target audience for contemporary Christian radio stations was teenagers: both those who were Christians and looking for an alternative to secular rock music, and those who were not Christians but might be open to listening to Christian rock music. In the 1980s and 90s, many Christian stations functioned like this,

37. Ibid.

38. William Ruhlmann, "Amy Grant: Biography," *Billboard*, accessed March 17, 2015, <http://www.billboard.com/artist/278956/amy-grant/biography>.

39. Steve Leggett, "Josh Wilson: Biography," *Billboard*, accessed March 17, 2015, <http://www.billboard.com/artist/305249/josh-wilson/biography>.

40. David Jeffries, "Britt Nicole: Biography," *Billboard*, accessed March 17, 2015, <http://www.billboard.com/artist/297531/britt-nicole/biography>.

playing hard rock music rather than music one would hear in church. However, most of these stations eventually changed their target audience to women with children. There were a few reasons for this shift in focus. First, it was designed to support and encourage the family unit; secondly, it was a financial decision, so that advertisements could be targeted to these mothers, since teenagers were less likely to respond to advertisements or support a radio station.⁴¹

K-LOVE. A prime example of a thriving contemporary Christian radio station today is K-LOVE. This radio station was started in 1982, under the name “KCLB,” with a mission to reach people with the truth of the gospel and encouragement. In 1988, the name was changed to K-LOVE and the station grew to include locations throughout the United States. A decade later, the radio station started broadcasting on the Internet, and could reach the entire world. Soon after, K-LOVE began a partnership with a Christian radio station called Air1. While K-LOVE’s target audience was families, Air1 played edgier Christian rock music that would appeal to young adults and adolescents. Today, in 2015, K-LOVE is still one of the leading contemporary Christian music radio stations in the United States.⁴²

Success of Christian radio. Listeners of contemporary Christian music radio have different reasons for choosing to listen. Some simply listen because they love the music, but many who may not agree with the Christian message choose Christian radio simply because it is an alternative to secular stations, which frequently air content that is

41. Robert Lochte, “Contemporary Christian Radio in the United States,” *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media* 5, no. 2-3 (2008): 113-28.

42. K-LOVE, “K-LOVE,” K-LOVE, accessed January 31, 2015, <http://www.klove.com/promodetails.aspx?i=1449>.

offensive or not family-friendly. Still others choose Christian radio because of the positive and encouraging message.⁴³

Christian radio has affected church worship by making new Christian music accessible. Until the mid-twentieth century, church music was almost exclusively found in hymnals. One exception, however, was Moody Radio, a Christian radio station that actually did play music.⁴⁴ Now, since the rise in popularity of Christian music radio, it is common for churches to play songs from Christian radio.⁴⁵ As a result, church praise teams often strive to achieve the sound and quality of the worship music that is available from professional record companies via Internet streaming and radio.⁴⁶

Contemporary Christian Music Today

Today, contemporary Christian music has become a multi-million dollar industry. Many mainstream evangelical churches in the United States utilize contemporary Christian music in their worship services.⁴⁷ But there are outliers who refuse to use contemporary Christian music for reasons that will be addressed later in this paper. There are several sub-genres of contemporary Christian music, including Christian rap, rock,

43. P. A. Creasman, "Sanctified Entertainment: Contemporary Christian Music Radio," *Religious Broadcasting* 28, no. 4 (1996): 26-30.

44. Moody Radio, "Moody Radio History," Moody Radio, accessed March 15, 2015, http://www.moodyradio.org/brd_mainpage.aspx?id=6430.

45. Kim Anthony Gentes, "Theological Defense Worship Resource Guide," (2012), 4.

46. David McClendon, "Plugging into Worship: How Contemporary Christian Music is Impacting Church Musicians," (Williamsburg: The College of William and Mary, 2008), 18.

47. Robert Woods and Brian Walrath, eds. *The Message in the Music: Studying Contemporary Praise and Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), ch. i.

pop, and worship music. Basically, any style of secular music has its Christian equivalent.⁴⁸

Christian music serves many purposes. To some, it is just a family-friendly alternative to secular pop music. Often a popular Christian artist will be compared to a secular artist with a similar sound, marketed as a safe alternative to the secular version.⁴⁹ Other contemporary Christian music addresses a social justice theme or a problem seen within the church.⁵⁰ Some of these songs that talk about social justice or other topics not necessarily mentioning God are defined as “cross-over” music, and are accepted by both the Christian and secular industry because they do not contain explicit references to God or the Bible.⁵¹ An example of cross-over music is that of the band Switchfoot. This band’s song “Meant to Live” achieved success with both Christian and secular radio stations when it was released in 2003.^{52; 53} Still other Christian music is written specifically to be used in church worship. Worship music, defined as Christian music that praises God and can be sung congregationally, is a huge part of the Christian music

48. Billboard, “Christian Albums Week of March 15, 2015,” Billboard, accessed March 15, 2015, <http://www.billboard.com/charts/christian-albums>.

49. Mark Allan Powell, “Jesus Climbs the Charts: The Business of Contemporary Christian Music,” *Christian Century* 119, no. 26 (2002), accessed January 29, 2015, <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2627>.

50. Howard, 123-130.

51. Livengood and Ledoux, 121.

52. Lindsey Borders, “Switchfoot Transcends Christian and Mainstream Genres with Their Music,” AXS, May 28, 2014, accessed March 18, 2015, <http://www.axs.com/switchfoot-transcends-christian-and-mainstream-genres-with-their-music-11302>.

53. Andy Argyrakis, “Story Behind the Song: Switchfoot’s ‘Meant to Live,’” Today’s Christian Music, accessed March 18, 2015, <http://www.todayschristianmusic.com/artists/switchfoot/features/story-behind-the-song-switchfoot-s-meant-to-live/>.

industry. This music can be popular on the radio as well, but is purposed for congregational singing.⁵⁴

Contemporary Christian Music and the Worship Leader

Perhaps the person whom the popularization of contemporary Christian music has affected the most is the worship leader. Before contemporary Christian music became the worship style of most evangelical churches in the United States, the man choosing and directing the music was referred to as the minister of music. He was usually accompanied by a piano or organ, and the congregation followed along with hymnals. Since this was the entire extent of the job description of the minister of music, it was a part-time job or completely volunteer.⁵⁵

Now, instead of the minister of music, many churches utilize a worship leader, and he or she spends many hours each week preparing for and leading worship. This position of worship leader now requires more work and planning because of both the nature of contemporary Christian worship music and the range of technology that is used in churches today.⁵⁶

Since contemporary Christian worship music typically utilizes a full rock band, several volunteers or paid musicians are needed to complete the ensemble. A worship leader usually finds and schedules volunteers, leads rehearsals and worship services, and plans the music and creative elements for every service. Finding musicians to play and sing in the worship service can involve auditions or interviews. A worship leader must

54. Woods and Walrath, ch. i.

55. Bob Kauflin, *Worship Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 51.

56. Barry Wayne Liesch, *The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 98.

decide if the musician is skilled enough at their instrument to do everything that is needed for the position, and where they are in their spiritual maturity. Some churches require all of the musicians and vocalists in the praise band to be Christ-followers; for some other churches that is not a requirement.⁵⁷ Scheduling band members can be done through resources such as Google calendar⁵⁸ or Planning Center, a website that is designed for worship leaders to plan services and share with others involved.⁵⁹ Leading rehearsals often involves not only making sure the band is technically prepared to play all the songs for the worship service, but also having a corporate time of prayer or a devotion.⁶⁰

Technology in Worship

The technology used in worship services is closely linked with contemporary Christian music. Because the congregation is used to hearing the songs on the radio or at concerts of major Christian musicians, the worship band often plays music as closely to its original style as possible. This requires a full band – electric and acoustic guitars, a bass guitar, drums, a piano, an electric keyboard, and usually at least one male and one female singer.⁶¹ Of course, many churches use different instruments, or utilize many

57. McClendon, 20.

58. Google Calendar, “Welcome to Google Calendar – Calendar Help,” Google Calendar, accessed February 6, 2015, <https://support.google.com/calendar/answer/2465776?hl=en>.

59. Planning Center Online, “Services | Planning Center Online,” Planning Center Online, accessed February 6, 2015, <http://get.planningcenteronline.com/services>.

60. McClendon, 33.

61. Ibid, 17.

more instruments than listed here. One trend that is popular in worship music today is using instruments such as the banjo for a folk sound.⁶²

Sound system. A full band necessitates a full sound system complete with accessories such as speakers, microphones, and electric amplifiers. This enables the entire room to hear a balance of instruments and voices. The pastor of a church with a sound system will usually use a microphone for speaking as well.⁶³ At least one person is required to run the sound system, and for this task it is necessary to possess extensive knowledge of the sound system. A soundboard can contain many different buttons and knobs that all control different inputs and outputs, so it can be difficult for a worship leader to find a trustworthy person to run sound for the worship service.⁶⁴ Whereas before Christian rock music was played in churches, the minister of music had no need to possess knowledge of technology beyond possibly projecting slides of lyrics; today, many churches require their worship leaders to possess at least a basic knowledge of sound systems, music software, video, and/or lighting.⁶⁵

Lighting. Some churches make use of concert-style lighting, as well. This can control the congregation's focus or minimize distractions around the room by dimming or concentrating the lights.⁶⁶ Colored or moving lights can also be used to create a desired

62. Michael Pocock and Joseph Henriques. *Cultural Change & Your Church: Helping Your Church Thrive in a Diverse Society* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), 53.

63. Jon F. Eiche, ed., *Guide to Sound Systems for Worship* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corporation, 1990), 151.

64. Brad Herring, *Sound, Lighting and Video: A Resource for Worship* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2009), ch. 1.

65. Liesch, 98.

66. Ibid, 99.

atmosphere of contemplation or celebration. One downfall of specialized lighting in churches, however, is that it can be extremely expensive.⁶⁷

Other technologies for worship. Another reason that technology is such a large part of church worship services today is simply that it is available and makes worship services easier for the congregation. For example, instead of each congregant holding a hymnal, looking up each song, and looking down to read from a book during worship, the words can now be shown on a screen above or beside the worship team. There are several software brands that are specifically designed for church worship, the most popular of which include ProPresenter⁶⁸ and Easy Worship.⁶⁹ These allow worship leaders or volunteers to enter each song in only once, in a presentation style complete with graphics or videos, and then put together a playlist for the whole service each week, allowing for seamless transitions and fewer distractions.⁷⁰

The Controversy Surrounding Contemporary Christian Music

The relationship between the church and contemporary Christian music cannot be fully explained without addressing the extreme controversy that surrounds the issue of using instruments associated with secular rock music in worship. The issue of whether the church should sing only contemporary Christian music, traditional hymns, or a combination of both has caused seemingly endless division within churches in the United

67. Herring, ch. 10.

68. Renewed Vision's, "ProPresenter 5," Renewed Vision's, accessed February 6, 2015, <http://www.renewedvision.com/aboutus.php>.

69. EasyWorship 6. Point. Click. Pro., "EasyWorship.com, The Standard in Church Presentation Software," EasyWorship 6. Point. Click. Pro., accessed February 6, 2015, <https://www.easyworship.com/software/easyworship/features>.

70. Herring, ch. 25.

States. This tension has been so widespread, in fact, that it has been referred to as the “worship wars.”⁷¹ Indeed, to many churches the controversy over contemporary Christian music has felt much like a war. There have been various approaches to solving this problem. Many churches have two separate services for each kind of music in order to try to solve this debate. But creating two separate services with different styles does not solve the problem for some churches. Many church members have long been zealous in their beliefs of what is or is not appropriate and effective music for worship.⁷²

Hymns and the worship wars. On one side of these “worship wars” are those who believe only traditional hymns should be used in worship music. Some of these are older generations who grew up singing from hymnals and simply dislike the contemporary style of worship. Others are more adamant about only using hymnals, including some who call themselves “fundamentalists.”⁷³

Those who are against contemporary Christian music have genuine concerns about using this style in church worship. Some worry that contemporary praise choruses use shallow theological language and do not contain the same rich doctrinal depth of traditional hymns.⁷⁴ Others have the opinion that using rock music – music that is associated with worldliness – is equivalent to “conforming to the world.”⁷⁵ Still others

71. Woods and Walrath, ch. i.

72. Ibid.

73. Hubert T. Spence, *Confronting Contemporary Christian Music: A Plain Account of Its History, Philosophy, and Future* (Dunn, NC: Foundations Bible College, 2002): 28-29.

74. Woods and Walrath, ch. i.

75. Elmer L. Towns, *Putting an End to Worship Wars* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 59.

simply believe that rock music is sinful.⁷⁶ Some churches hold worship services that strictly use hymns and do not include any contemporary music, advertising these services as “traditional.”⁷⁷ It would seem that contemporary Christian music has not had much of an effect on the worship music of these churches, since they reject it; it has still affected the churches in that they make a point of elucidating the fact that they use exclusively traditional music.

Contemporary music and the worship wars. On the other side of this dispute are those who believe that it is best to use contemporary music in church worship services. Some reasons that these believers hold this opinion are that diversity in musical preference does exist among Christians, and is good;⁷⁸ that this music is more engaging to the congregation;⁷⁹ and that it speaks in language familiar to non-believers.⁸⁰

This group would argue that worship music in the church should be easy for people to sing along with and easy for even unbelievers to understand. Some traditional hymns do tend to have more complicated melodies and harmonies, and include difficult theological language. Many contemporary worship songs are written to be easy to sing and understand.⁸¹

76. Spence, 137.

77. Ronald P. Byars, *The Future of Protestant Worship: Beyond the Worship Wars* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2002), 37.

78. Woods and Walrath, ch. i.

79. Andrew Thompson, “Desiring Repetition: Søren Kierkegaard’s Metaphor of the Theater in Dialogue with Contemporary Worship Leadership Models,” accessed May 1, 2014, <http://www.sorenkierkegaard.nl/artikelen/Engels/099.%20desiringrepetition.pdf>.

80. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 232.

81. Gesa F. Hartje, “Keeping in Tune with the Times—Praise & Worship Music as Today’s Evangelical Hymnody in North America,” *Dialog* 48, no. 4 (2009): 364-373.

Blended worship. Some churches simply have one service that uses only traditional music, and another that uses only contemporary Christian music in an attempt to please those from both sides.⁸² However, an approach that many churches have taken to rectify this traditional versus contemporary music controversy is to use both. Commonly referred to as “blended worship,” these churches sing some hymns and some contemporary Christian music attempting to blend the two styles. The hymns are often given a slight update in instrumentation and arrangement to fit with the contemporary Christian songs, which are often toned down and given a more formal sound. This approach has worked well for many American evangelical churches.⁸³

Songs from the Church

Not only does the church look for music from contemporary Christian radio and publishing companies, but increasingly songs are being written in churches. Some of these songs then make their way to Christian radio. There are also many contemporary Christian songs that are written for radio and make their way to the church, but some of the most popular worship songs in the last few decades have been written with no intention of eventually being on the radio. But that is where they ended up. Technology now allows for churches to record and publish their own music, without an outside record label. Because of this, the local church has become a primary source for new worship music and worship artists. In recent years, worship teams from megachurches such as

82. Liesch, 27.

83. Ligon Duncan, Dan Kimball, Michael Lawrence, Mark Dever, Timothy Quill, Dan Wilt, and J. Matthew Pinson, *Perspectives on Christian Worship: 5 Views* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2009), ch. 7.

Elevation,⁸⁴ Vertical Church Band,⁸⁵ and Bethel Music⁸⁶ have sold thousands of albums and become popular artists around the United States. Hillsong church, which originated in Australia, has long been known for writing and distributing worship songs for the church.⁸⁷

A couple examples of this are “Shout to the Lord” and “Revelation Song.” The writers of both of these songs were worship leaders, and both songs were introduced in the writer’s home church. Eventually, both songs became popular in worship services around the world, on the radio, and on Christian albums.

“Shout to the Lord” was written by Darlene Zschech in 1993, and although she had never written a song before, she was prompted to play the song for her worship pastor at Hillsong Australia. He instantly felt that “Shout to the Lord” was a song the church needed to sing. Hillsong began using it in worship services, and published it on their next album. Soon, churches around the world were singing this song. The song topped the worship charts for over thirty weeks, and was nominated for “Song of the

84. Elevation Worship RSS, “Elevation Worship | Wake Up The Wonder,” Elevation Worship RSS, accessed February 4, 2015, <http://elevationworship.com/about/>.

85. Essential Worship, “Vertical Church Band,” Essential Worship, accessed February 6, 2015, <http://www.essentialworship.com/vertical-church-band/>.

86. Bethel Music, “About Us | Bethel Music,” Bethel Music, accessed February 6, 2015, <http://bethelmusic.com/about/>.

87. Hillsong Music: Shout! Music, “About Us,” Hillsong Music: Shout! Music, accessed February 5, 2015, <https://distribution.hillsong.com/help/about>.

Year” at the Dove Awards in 1997⁸⁸. Even today, “Shout to the Lord” is still sung in worship by churches everywhere.⁸⁹

“Revelation Song” was written by Jennie Lee Riddle in 1999. She wanted to write a song that captured the idea of angels encircling the throne of God and singing, as pictured in Revelation 4:2-8. After writing the song, she thought about sharing it with some missionaries she knew around the world, who would be able to translate it and share with their friends. Beyond that, she had no plans for it until one church service, she felt moved by the Holy Spirit to play and sing the song with the congregation spontaneously. It was clear to her that the song powerfully spoke of the holiness and glory of God, and a music producer friend of Riddle’s approached her wanting to publish the song. She agreed, and soon “Revelation Song” was being sung around the world by many different churches and musicians.⁹⁰

Conclusion

From its simple beginnings in the Jesus Movement to the Internet, radio stations, churches, and musicians of the Christian music industry today, contemporary Christian music has undoubtedly had an irreversible effect on the style of church worship music. Likewise, the church’s contribution to and use of contemporary Christian music is vital to its continuation and success.

The music composed during the Jesus Movement revival was simple, and its composers did not even intend to change church music. They only sang the music they

88. Lindsay Terry, *The Sacrifice of Praise: Stories Behind the Greatest Praise and Worship Songs of All Time* (Brentwood, TN: Integrity Publishers, 2002), ch. 2.

89. Michael Ciani, “Shout to the Lord,” Crosswalk.com, April 15, 2003, accessed February 6, 2015, <http://www.crosswalk.com/culture/music/shout-to-the-lord-1193600.html>.

90. Kevin Davis, “#319 – ‘Revelation Song’ by Jennie Lee Riddle,” New Release Tuesday, May 8, 2012, accessed February 6, 2015, http://www.newreleasetuesday.com/article.php?article_id=840.

knew accompanied by lyrics of truth that they had just recently learned. Over half a century later, church worship music is forever different because of those musicians. Then, contemporary Christian music was composed and sung by hippies who were radically different than most churchgoers at the time, but today, believers of varying generations and lifestyles worship with contemporary Christian music every day.

The position of worship leader has been changed by the rise of contemporary Christian music, and the way congregations worship together is different in many churches. Christian radio is different, and has more variety than just talk radio; and the tension between those churches that sing contemporary Christian music and those that do not is still not fully resolved.

Today, contemporary songs are being written for the church, from songwriters in the church. Because of the resources available on the Internet today such as YouTube, Noisetrade, or iTunes, these contemporary worship songs can be distributed around the world and sung by congregations all throughout the globe. Contemporary Christian music has united global churches in this way and many more.

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