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Apocalyptic Music: Reflections on Countercultural Christian Influence

La Musique apocalyptique : l'influence chrétienne sur la contre-culture

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Apocalyptic Music: Reflections on Countercultural Christian Influence

par

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Abstract : During the late 1960s, thousands of young people in Southern California were swept up in a revival of conservative Christianity. Disenchanted with the existentialism found among various so-called “countercultural” groups, the “Jesus freaks” emerged. Though they proclaimed an ideology commonly associated with fundamentalist Christianity, hippie converts retained aesthetic practices emblematic of the hippie culture, in hopes of spreading the gospel using the cultural vernacular. The result was the birth of “Jesus music,” a folk rock style that would become contemporary Christian music (CCM), a genre that developed into a medium for articulating a particular interpretation of the End of Days.

Keywords : *Apocalyptic – Christian Rock – Counterculture – Doomsday – Evangelical Left – Jesus Movement – Religious Right*

Résumé : Pendant les années 1960, en Californie du Sud, des milliers de jeunes participèrent à une renaissance du christianisme conservateur. Désabusés par l'existentialisme d'autres groupes prétendument « contre-culturels », les « Jesus freaks » firent surface. Alors qu'ils prônaient une idéologie habituellement associée au christianisme fondamentaliste, ces hippies convertis maintinrent des pratiques esthétiques emblématiques de la culture hippie, espérant ainsi propager l'évangile par le truchement de la culture populaire. Ce mouvement donna naissance à la « musique de Jésus » [*Jesus music*], un genre de folk rock qui allait par la suite accoucher de la musique chrétienne actuelle, et qui servit de support à l'expression d'une interprétation particulière de la Fin des temps.

Mots-clés : *Apocalypse – rock chrétien – contre-culture – Jour du Jugement Dernier – gauche évangélique – Jesus Movement – droite religieuse*

The American counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s has remained a topic of fascination for historians and cultural theorists. The so-called “long sixties” serves as a cultural and historical compass for finding traces of subversive activity carried out by various radicals who hoped to construct a counternarrative to the dominant culture. Equally compelling, apocalyptic narratives continue to entrance the imagination (and sell product). This essay will demonstrate how evangelical Christians and the counterculture are connected—specifically that there are two countercultural threads associated with “Jesus-freak” music:

- 1) expressions of what I consider to be “countercultural” evangelicalism throughout the 1980s, which served as a counterpoint to music perceived as “worldly;”
- 2) emerging paradigm shifts among some forms of popular evangelical music (often leftward) evidenced by events such as the enigmatic Cornerstone Music Festival.

In each case the musics discussed have and continue to counter a theo-political narrative believed to be the epicenter off the evangelical paradigm. Lastly, the essay will show the relationship between certain expressions of pop music and the apocalyptic impulse. For the purposes of this paper, I use the term “countercultural Christian music” as a way to articulate difference between fringe expressions of Christian rock and those considered “normative” to the dominant parent culture of contemporary, evangelical Christian music. Furthermore, the term “countercultural Christian” has been adopted by a number of historians of religion in the U.S. as a way

to create a clear binary, when discussing dominant forms of protestant Christianity throughout the 1960s and 1970s and how those dominant forms were challenged. It is therefore critical to this particular study to use terminology common among historians of Christianity in the U.S.

Jesus Freaks

During the late 1960s, there was a revival of conservative, evangelical Christianity among youth in the U.S. While this included youth from a number of backgrounds and traditions, hippie Christians entranced media to the point of making headlines with major publications such as *Time* and *Life*. Commonly referred to as the Jesus Movement, the revival challenged traditional Christian aesthetics while embracing a conservative understanding of the Bible. Dubbed “Jesus freaks,” hippie converts represented a group of Christians who displayed similar qualities endemic to converts during the Great Awakenings. Historian Donald E. Miller has considered the impact of the Jesus Movement, arguing that it had the makings of a second Reformation: “Many of the principles of the Reformation were reborn as ordinary people discovered the priesthood of all believers, without ever reading Martin Luther” (Miller, 1999: 11, 12). Similarly, Jesus freaks questioned the authority of the church and reinstated biblical authority while simultaneously retaining what was widely considered a countercultural aesthetic, often sporting the hippie image while using popular music for Christian proselytizing. The fact that these converts rebelled against the church (initially) within a conservative “grid” is not without

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historical precedent. In considering the Second Great Awakening and new paradigm Christianity Miller notes, “in both instances, establishment religion is rejected” (11, 12, 13, 67, 180-185). As Jesus freaks became the “new paradigm” for many young evangelicals, a new norm was established, one which co-opted the tools and expressions common to other cultural revolutionaries. For Jesus freaks, the rejection of “establishment religion” had less to do with theology and more to do with using the cultural vernacular as a way of creating distance from the parent culture—though the eventual goal would be to reform the establishment.

The reverend Billy Graham made the Jesus Movement viable, offering a bridge for countercultural youth to return to evangelical Christianity (Eskridge, 1998: 106). Eileen Luhr argues that campus movements during the 1960s were actually about the “existential search for self-meaning and only secondarily as a leftist attempt at structural change.” If the period is recast in this manner, she argues, the Jesus Movement becomes “a critical part of the decade rather than an aberration,” (Luhr, 2009: 74) allowing certain hippies to be “reintegrated into the ‘continuing American consensus’” (Luhr, 2009: 68).

For youth, evangelism (proselytizing) surfaced in mediums such as publishing, film, television, festivals, and music, becoming a powerful force within American popular culture. This continued the historical lineage of American evangelicalism, affirming what historians such as David Bebbington and Nathan Hatch consider a complex, growing movement.¹

Donald Miller adds to the growing consensus surrounding the movement’s place in history. Specifically, Miller’s treatment of the movement’s ecclesial legacy (new paradigm churches) demonstrates how Jesus freaks institutionalized their attempts to counter mainline liberalism’s “inability” to deal with existential anxiety. Noting the cultural impact of the Jesus Movement, historian Larry Eskridge (1998: 104) underscores the reciprocal element (religion influencing culture and vice versa) common to early Jesus freaks who made use of and benefited from American popular culture: “Indeed, the Jesus Person ‘style’ continued to prosper as a distinct evangelical youth culture with concerts, coffeehouses, newspapers, bumper stickers, crosses, and Bible studies....”

The movement’s countercultural roots (in the narrower example of the hippie movement) have been well established by historians of religion in the U.S. However, the connection between the Jesus freaks, music, and apocalypticism remains largely under-researched. To better understand the significance of “countercultural Christian music,” one must look to the political “personality” of the movement, despite its own self-proclaimed apoliticism.

To the Left or the Right?

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, evangelical activism was, for the most part, confined to a war over family values. Despite this, Jesus-freak veterans identified social causes that aligned with their own cosmology—but first they had to perceive the original attempts of the counterculture as flawed, particularly

the New Left. What made new forms of activism necessary was the failure of the New Left. Todd Gitlin (1993: 436, 437) writes that “The New Left, like its predecessors, failed to create lasting political forms; when SDS [Students for a Democratic Party] was torn apart, so was the chance for continuity.” Consequently, “the New Left failed to produce the political leaders one might have expected of a movement so vast,” writes Gitlin. “The millennial, all-or-nothing moods of the Sixties,” he contends, “proved to be poor training grounds for practical politics.” Similarly, many Jesus freaks of the Seventies were ill prepared to organize sustained efforts toward projects dedicated to social justice. Furthermore, post-Jesus Movement evangelicals during the Eighties (many of whom were part of the Jesus-freak exodus from culture) translated activism in service of the Religious Right during the Reagan years. (Eskridge, 2005; Balmer, 2006; Shires, 2007; Stowe, 2011).

The co-optation of the Jesus Movement by the Religious Right has been well documented.² Rightist affiliation, however, did not extend to aesthetics. Rather, the power of aesthetics was harnessed to serve evangelical Christianity, a movement that grew increasingly conservative throughout the Reagan era. If nothing else, the hippie aesthetic was sutured to Biblical literalism, an approach to exegesis that has long been the hallmark of Christian fundamentalism. In *Hippies of the Religious Right* Preston Shires argues that both Christian fundamentalism and liberal Christianity alienated youth throughout the 1960s (Shires, 2007). Fundamentalism was anachronistic. Liberalism was fraught with endless theological uncertainty. Thus a hybrid (of sorts) was needed. “The eventual unity and common purpose shared

between countercultural Christianity and evangelicalism,” writes Shires, “surpassed that shared by the Beats and the Old Left...so much so that whereas the Old Left and the New Left disagreed on the means and purpose of reaching a non-capitalistic manner of life, countercultural Christianity [hippie Christianity] and evangelicalism eventually became unified both in goal and practice” (Shires, 2007: 113). He maintains that the inability for the Old and New Left to agree on social strategies actually proved advantageous for *conservative* evangelicals, particularly during the rise of the Right in the 1980s.

The move rightward for Jesus freaks was multifaceted. Although early hippies have often been depicted as apolitical, *early* Jesus freaks (to some extent) balanced their skyward gaze with a form of practical politics nuanced by dedication to a specific brand of eschatology, most notably dispensational premillennialism, a doctrine fleshed out by the nineteenth-century minister John Nelson Darby. For many hippie converts this eschatological position connected global events to the doctrine of the Rapture, an event many evangelicals believe a seminal moment in history: Christ will secretly gather those who have been “born again” skyward, leaving the “unsaved” to endure a tumultuous world governed by the antichrist.

It was believed that global events portended things to come. “Part of the reason countercultural Christians would move rightward in their political orientation,” argues Shires, had little to do with domestic policies, but “a great deal to do with world affairs” (Shires, 2007: 153, 154, 155). Unconditional support for Israel was “perhaps the first shepherding of Jesus

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Freaks toward a political position” (108). Simply put, Jesus freaks were wooed by mythologies of the apocalypse, not unlike their secular counterparts.

Connecting doomsday to the Middle East was stylish throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Author Hal Lindsey’s epic *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970) ushered in a new generation of doomsday disciples as global events all appeared to confirm what both secularists and religionist suspected—the end was near. It is within this milieu that Lindsey’s novel, writes David W. Stowe, “popularized and condensed a body of thought about the end of the world that reached back over a century” (Stowe, 2001: 70, 71).

Jesus Freaks and Rightist Affiliates

Pastors trained within the context of the Jesus Movement often maintained the hippie aesthetic. However, they tended to shed the more radical political notions previously held by affiliate countercultural movements: beats, diggers, the Black Panthers, Weathermen, Motherfuckers, hippies, yippies, SDS, etc. Despite any attempt to construct an ideological distance from secular counterparts, Jesus-freak pastors remained wary of a “plastic” America as they simultaneously decried the excesses of reactionary moralities, which typified the now-romanticized “seeker” of the Sixties and “hedonist” of the Seventies.

For the Jesus Movement, a growing amorality appeared antithetical to the original intent of the hippie quest for enlightenment. Thus, many rallied around the growing Religious Right. Duane M. Oldfield writes that “the New Right is seen as

a status-based reaction against the trends of modernization and the social elites who embody those trends” producing anxieties, which produce reactions “against the complexities of the modern world” (Oldfield, 1996: 38). Ironically, this is a similar social critique held by those in the New Left. Oldfield differentiates between the various expressions of the Right: New Right, Religious Right, Christian Right, Moral Majority, and the Christian Coalition. Hoping to find a common ground (the culture war), some of these umbrella organizations affirmed an ecumenism that created a coalition of politically and culturally like-minded constituents—regardless of theological orientation. Others particularized their agendas. But overall, social issues that involved faith-based interpretations of *moral-ity* trumped concerns for social justice as personal *encounters* with Jesus (or faith-based family values) took priority. Organized efforts to avoid (or at the very least, minimize) social justice/activism was linked to millenarian expectancy; evangelists sought to convert people before the End of Days or to reestablish a Christian nation *before* the end. But what sort of action does this involve?

The millennialist vision often produces both action *and* apathy. Martha Lee and Herbert Simms (2007: 112) argue that within the North American context “a group’s orientation (religious or secular) is a stronger predictor of [millenarian-based] violence [or social apathy] than the socioeconomic factors that contribute to the initial development of millenarianism.” While the context used by Lee and Simms applies to violence it is conceivable that those apathetic to social justice—poverty, war, the environment, etc.—are involved in a direct form of *inaction*

(action by negation). Put another way, when matters of social justice are de-prioritized due to millennial expectancy (as was the case with evangelists such as D.L. Moody and Billy Sunday), what is otherwise a passive millenarianism becomes ironically *active* as leaders and parishioners allow suspicions of government and science—because of eschatological assumptions—to overwhelm any sense of objectivity concerning social causes linked to state and federal funding. Active inaction (or conscious social apathy) is evidenced in various Christian rock songs popularized during the 1980s (discussed later). Thus any attempts within conservative evangelicalism to engage social issues (those deemed important by establishment evangelicals) are often blunted as the End of Days remains ever on the horizon for the millenarian. The most noteworthy example of social apathy remains environmentalism.

Post-hippie Jesus freaks quelled any former urge to support environmental causes (as one example) thus *countering* their original parent (counter) culture. According to Frank Schaeffer (son of Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer), Richard Cizik, former vice president of the National Association of Evangelicals, “had almost been forced out...when James Dobson [*Focus on the Family*] wrote to the NAE [National Association of Evangelicals] board demanding Cizik’s dismissal for saying that he thought global warming was real” (Schaeffer, 2010). There are certainly those who oppose this issue based on a perceived lack of scientific evidence or the fiscal affects of environmental activism and industrial overhaul—the loss of jobs. However, Dobson represents a continuum of evangelicals (which includes baby boom, Jesus Movement veterans) who affirm

the doctrine of human depravity and view suspect any attempt to “engineer” divine plan. The moratorium placed on environmentalism has been cloaked (at least in the past) in a shroud of religious determinism. Put another way, while conservative evangelicals have often opposed government regulations on economic grounds, the specter of eschatology, I would argue, fuels economic theory...at least for those who have maintained a commitment to theologies associated with the Rapture and the Middle East.

This brand of evangelicalism has often characterized social justice as a mere bandage on a wound that yields to divine plan, only healed after a quite specific cosmic story unfolds. If this were otherwise—if Dobson’s call for Cizik’s resignation were merely a difference of opinion on matters of science or fiscal responsibility—he would not have called for the resignation of a position that represents spiritual leadership. Was Dobson’s problem theological? Although James Dobson also represents a tradition of evangelicals who seek to (ironically) Christianize society, the millenarian impulse remains a powerful influence over biblical literalists. But this impulse does not negate the need to Christianize society. On the contrary. The apocalyptic tradition has many facets, two of which have thoroughly defined conservative, American evangelicals since the nineteenth century.

Many Jesus freaks were strongly influenced by Hal Lindsey’s popular reiteration of dispensational premillennialism. However, for the postmillennialist, Christ will only return to a well-kept planet, one peopled by believers awaiting God’s kingdom to come on Earth—literally. The result has been an increase in Christian Dominionism, a belief that

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Jesus will return and establish his kingdom on Earth after Christians have occupied positions of power. Contemporary Dominionism can be seen in the movement led by C. Peter Wagner's New Apostolic Reformation, a push to "reclaim the seven mountains of culture': government, religion, media, family, business, education, and arts and entertainment"—a countercultural act if there ever were one (Burke, 2011)!

Exceptions to the rule

As has been established, early Jesus freaks (and music associated with the movement) was a revival of a more conservative version of evangelical Christianity. But despite the near ubiquity of pop forms of Christian revivalism throughout the 1970s and '80s, other expressions existed. Although common historical narratives about the West-Coast Jesus Movement often portray communities such as the Vineyard Church and Calvary Chapel as co-opted arms of the Religious Right, little attention has been given to the left wing of the movement.

Throughout the 1960s and into the '70s a great number of Jesus-freak communes developed, each with very different agendas. In considering a number of countercultural communal experiments of the time, historian Timothy Miller has observed that "so many of them erupted that the Jesus movement communes may have been, in terms of sheer numbers of communes and of members, the largest identifiable communal type during the 1960s era" (Miller, 1999: xxiv). Although these were all com-

munally based and evangelical, they were not necessarily left-leaning in political identity.

After the initial movement's late 1960s' genesis in Southern California (Eskridge, 2005) a parallel story developed. In the winter of 1972 the seeds for a very different expression of evangelical Christianity and music formed out of Milwaukee, Wisconsin's Jesus People Army (JPA). Out this community sprang a collective articulation of evangelical Christianity that was wholly counter to its predecessors. A handful of JPA members were sent out as The Jesus People U.S.A. Traveling Team, a folk-rock style "Jesus music" group. This traveling community gave rise to a new communal experiment known as Jesus People USA (JPUSA) and evangelicalism's first official hard rock group, the Resurrection Band (also Rez).

The fledgling community settled in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood with hopes of providing aid to local low-income families and the homeless. JPUSA's commune continues as a group of aging Jesus freaks and young punkers and "Goths." Considered a significant development for any evangelical community—particularly in the shadow of American individualism and capitalism—this inner-city commune's choice to live out of a common purse serves as a counterpoint to what has historically been viewed as the Republican base...at least within recent years. With an annual average of four hundred members, this left-leaning community complicates assumptions about evangelical ideology and music. Along with other members of the "Evangelical Left," (such as Brian McLaren and Jim Wallis, Shane Claiborne, and Sojourners), this community serves as the exception to a once widespread conservatism among American evangelicals.

But as we shall see, the Christian version of the countercultural *impulse*—the need to challenge the hegemonic structure of the more dominant forms of Christianity (in this case, evangelicalism)—continues to inspire converts influenced by cultural radicalism, specifically the kind nurtured by early hippies and beatniks. (Young, 2011.)

Songs of the End

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s there was a growing fascination with the Apocalypse. Barry McGuire's classic "Eve of Destruction" (1965) gained notoriety within the context of radicals, revolutionaries, and those who were convinced the world was on the brink of either cosmic or physical annihilation. Along with Bob Dylan, McGuire's conversion to Christianity gave credibility to the rising Jesus-freak revolution. As celebrities such as Johnny Cash and Eric Clapton converted, revivalistic Christianity found entry into the entertainment industry, launching a groundswell of activity. Paul Stookey preached at Berkeley's Sproul Hall. Kerry Livgren ended his search in the early Eighties, espousing Christianity openly through his rock group Kansas. And Fleetwood Mac's Jeremy Spencer joined the rigid and controversial commune the Children of God, a notable doomsday group.

Secular rock groups also explored religious themes, adding to the already enigmatic culture of Christian hippies. The Byrds' version of "Jesus is Just Alright" (1969), Ocean's "Put Your Hand in the Hand" (1970), Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Bad Moon Rising" (1969), and Norman Greenbaum's "Spirit In The Sky"

(1969) all implied that some expressions of the Cultural Revolution were beginning to change focus—to a point.³ A paradigmatic shift occurred as young people wove tales of doomsday and sought absolutist resolve within a postmodern milieu. The result, however, was not merely the quieting of existential angst. Rather, this new movement gained hegemonic power as minstrels of the apocalypse found cultural traction within the religious mainstream.

Early converts knew the power of rock & roll. Hoping to garner a following, they chose to employ tools with which they were most familiar. In 1971, *Time* magazine said of the music that it was the "special medium of the Jesus Movement." Musicals such as *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Godspell* added to a growing interest in hippie Christianity (spirituality more generally), bringing what was, to some extent, a vestige of Christian thinking into every sphere of pop culture. Christian rock emphasized a cosmology that was both triumphalist/postmillennialist (God's kingdom can be realized on earth as Christianity gains global influence) and premillennialist (Jesus would return in the Rapture to escort believers to Heaven). Now a powerful force in the music industry, Christian rock still retains elements of the eschatology that defined early Jesus freaks. As a result, fans often maintain a skyward gaze, looking for what humans have sought for centuries—signs of the end.

While Jesus freaks were largely apolitical, their fascination with the end of time (evidenced by their music) underscored the ways in which they viewed and engaged society. In *Children of Doom*, John W. Drakeford (1972: 36) refers to the phenomenon

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of this fledgling movement as a “strange shotgun marriage of conservative religion and a rebellious counterculture.” Young converts simply expected the imminent return of Christ and the battle of Armageddon—and they viewed global events as predictors of things to come.

As established earlier, the millennial fervor that seemed to affect various expressions of the Cultural Revolution was already evident in pop music. McGuire’s “Eve of Destruction” painted a cynical picture of a hypocritical, violent world contributing to its own demise. But the immediate concern over catastrophic events such as the Vietnam War faded as Jesus freaks turned their attention to what they perceived as the big picture.

In the early 1970s Jesus rocker Larry Norman warned of the coming Rapture of the church. Others followed, proclaiming the advent of the apocalypse. Songs of doom and glory went beyond mere hokum escapades by hopeful minstrels seeking a better world. Music influenced by any “politics of the end” was grounded in a deeper, populist response to a chaotic world. But it also represented a particular interpretation of historic events related to biblical prophecy. Historian David W. Stowe (2011: 71) has argued that through the teachings of various Jesus Movement leaders, “the theology of Rapture and Armageddon [became] one of the central threads in the music and belief of baby boom Christians, touching the music of everyone from [Jesus rockers] Larry Norman and Keith Green to Bob Dylan.” Norman’s classic song “I Wish We’d All Been Ready” (1972)—part of the track to the film series that mirrored author Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth*—highlighted the sense of

urgency with which evangelicals dealt; it was the anthem of the Jesus Movement’s rapture theology throughout the 1970s and formed the seedbed for what would come to define evangelical pop music throughout the 1980s.

Jesus music gained cultural traction, giving rise to a formidable niche genre known as contemporary Christian music (CCM). Throughout the 1980s Christian rock emerged into an expression of Christian conservatism on par with the political agenda of the Religious Right. Bands and songs evinced an historical connection with Jesus-Movement predecessors and Regan-era evangelicalism. As such, CCM—seated in Nashville, the epicenter of the Bible Belt—eventually became associated with political positions that were nationalistic, anti-abortion, pro-military and to some extent, anti-gay. In this sense, the brand of CCM endemic to Regan-era evangelicalism worked to operate as a contrary to many of the cultural values established during the Cultural Revolution.

Eileen Luhr offers an analysis of this cultural moment and its subsequent impact on American youth. Throughout the 1980s, argues Luhr, parents “aggressively sought to reclaim the category of youth” hoping to restore meaning, purpose, and “traditional’ authority in both public and private spaces” (33). The perception of cultural threat warranted new ways of viewing culture, thus continuing the evangelical heritage of cultural activism. Contrary to the Old Right, these families believed they could co-opt converts to “restore’ Christianity to the dominant spaces of suburbia” (101). For conservatives, young people represented a new hope to challenge issues considered detrimental to tradi-

tional values. The elimination of school prayer and the legalization of abortion mobilized a new generation of culture-savvy evangelicals. Couched in the rhetoric of war, these issues were presented (via Christian rock) in a way that tapped youth *rebellion*, thus serving the purposes of conservative organizations such as the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition. Moreover, Christian metal bands, writes Luhr, were “an integral part of the cultural work of the Christian Right “which comment[ed] on contemporary society” (136).

This new form of socio-cultural activism also served “Middle America” by exploring “suburban revivalism,” a development Luhr links to baby boom evangelicals and the various cultural possibilities established during the Jesus Movement. Her study of the 1998 Harvest Crusade—an evangelical outreach event held at the Anaheim Stadium in Anaheim, California—offers a glimpse into a quintessential example of post-Jesus Movement, baby boom evangelicalism. The crusade exemplified how evangelical Christianity absorbed popular entertainment and later came to define “third-wave” evangelical conservatism at the turn-of-the-century.

Suburban revivalism during the 1990s went beyond simple proselytizing, going on to serve as a platform for conservative responses to the “culture war.” Viewed as an affront to “family values,” issues such as gay rights continued to galvanize social conservatives, providing impetus for a newer, revised activism as evangelicals offered crusades, Christian rock festivals, and developed business relationships with amusement parks. Moreover, “evangelicals tried to buttress conservative values by making consumer culture—from bumper stickers to contemporary

music to a ballpark atmosphere—a starting point for restoring biblical values to the suburbs,” providing evangelicals with important acts of “sacralization in which public space was claimed for Christ” (Luhr, 2009: 177). “In 2004,” writes Luhr, “concerts and benefits became part of a broader infrastructure for locating conservative voters” (197).

Beyond the battle for culture, a number of music groups remained apocalyptically-minded, often depicting their “brand” as rhetorically combative in both name and lyric: Stryken, Bloodgood, Gardian (later Guardian), Rage of Angels, Sacred Warrior, and Holy Soldier. Song lyrics portrayed a universe embattled with the forces of darkness, emphasizing a world on the brink of nuclear, cultural, or spiritual holocaust. The doctrine of the Rapture continued to be proclaimed in song throughout the Eighties and Nineties. Christian rock warned of the impending close of history. Petra’s “Grave Robber” (1983) and “Not of This World” (1983), as well as Mylon Le Fevre’s “Crack the Sky” (1987) all portrayed a transitory world for those who had been “born again.” Those who were “lost” would endure the anti-Christ and hell.

Post-Jesus Movement converts continued to look skyward for the Second Coming. Christian rockers echoed a similar message: the world was evil and would soon be judged by God. While not entirely xenophobic, these groups have been categorized by sociologist Jay R. Howard as “Separational CCM,” a model that characterizes the artist as one who is wholly *counter* to mainline culture and is wholly separate from what is perceived as evil (Howard and Streck, 1999).

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While standard “mainstream” Christian rock continued to mirror separational tendencies (a product of Cold-War evangelical tension), heavy metal brought with it the headiest representations of human anxiety. Metal came to dominate much of the “arena rock” genre of the 1980s. Not unlike accommodationist methods of early Jesus rockers, metal heads and punk rockers applied a biblical worldview to musical forms once deemed subversive by mainline evangelicals, gesturing toward a different version of social inversion (Hebdige, 1979). Despite this, notes historian Eileen Luhr, the burgeoning new styles were given the green light as parents and churches seized the opportunity to use metal and punk to invert “sinful” messages portrayed by their secular counterparts. This cooptation (if we can call it that) allowed evangelical youth to engage in social and cultural resistance—to both the secular and CCM mainstream. The metal group Stryper’s *Soldiers Under Command* (1985) capitalized on teen angst, encouraging listeners that they were part of God’s army—which would vanquish the forces of evil. Even mainstream CCM groups such as Petra contributed to the milieu with songs that portrayed either cultural embattlement or apocalypticism: “This Means War” (1987), “He Came, He Saw, He Conquered” (1987), ending the decade with “Armed and Dangerous” (1990).

Christian heavy metal music has played a significant role in dichotomizing the world and inspiring the apocalyptic imagination. As a genre, heavy metal (regardless of religious affiliation) often constructs lyrics and imagery around apocalyptic scenarios, couching terrestrial life in clear binaries of good and evil, notes historian Jason Bivens. Emphasizing the darker side of life, many expressions of metal articulate

“alternate social worlds; these worlds may consist of sword and sorcery valor (Dio) or sociopolitical criticism (Napalm Death or Lamb of God), but they all bear traces of what [musicologist Robert] Walser identifies as metal’s key elements—its rebelliousness, its promise of an alternative identity and community, and its discourse of alienation and nihilism....” (Bivens, 2008: 107, 108)

Perry L. Glanzer argues that heavy metal music often draws from “Dionysian and Chaotic strands of pagan myth” (2003). Glanzer cites Sociologist Deena Weinstein who writes

“Dionysian experience...is embodied in the unholy trinity of sex, drugs and rock and roll. The Dionysian is juxtaposed to a strong emotional involvement in all that challenges the order and hegemony of everyday life: monsters, the underworld and hell, the grotesque and horrifying, disasters, mayhem, carnage, injustice, death and rebellion. Both Dionysus (the Greek god of wine) and Chaos (the most ancient god, who precedes from itself) are empowered by the sonic values of the music to fight a never-ending battle for the soul of the genre and to join together in combat against the smug security and safety of respectable society.” (Weinstein, 1991: 35)

Glanzer draws on Weinstein’s work to demonstrate how various Christians have appropriated the heavy metal genre, which actually compliments Christian millennial-apocalyptic mythology. Using Weinstein’s argument that metal largely draws on rhetorics of chaos rooted in Judeo-Christianity, Glanzer makes evident the connection between Christian heavy metal music and doomsday scenarios. He suggests that for a particular heavy metal church known as Sanctuary (an evangelical gathering that has encouraged the development of Christian metal) “apoca-

lyptic images from Daniel and Revelation and references to the battle between good and evil, as well as Ecclesiastical allusions regarding hopelessness and meaninglessness of life, were prominent” (Glanzer, 2003).

Evangelical musics have often underscored the dire nature of the world, as we have already established. Luhr’s account reinforces my own suspicion that fans of these genres adopted their own subversive messages in the interest of countering the secular mainstream:

“The Christian punk and metal scenes often offered contradictory messages that illuminate the contested nature of Christian and rock culture and that defy attempts to oversimplify what ‘conservatism’ offered to young people. Christian youths in the late twentieth century redefined true rebellion in a post-Christian (and post-1960s) world as obedience to biblical authority and resistance to a sinful world. In this interpretation, religious devotion and personal holiness allowed Christians to lay claim to being mavericks of popular culture.” (Luhr, 2009: 27)

Popular Christian music has often highlighted the human condition, the hope for a divinely orchestrated cataclysm, and even the macabre. Yet the forces of pluralism have begun to redefine ontological boundaries long cherished by evangelical musicians, allowing dialogue for ecumenical conversations pertaining to how the end should or ought to be perceived and represented in pop culture. To a certain extent the turn-of-the-millennium ironically brought with it more nuanced interpretations of the end of time.

Changes

Although CCM of the 1990s remained overtly Christian, many artists began to emphasize uncertainty about cosmic events. The Rapture had not occurred. And despite the emergence of new ventures into the apocalyptic—such as the *Left Behind* series, by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, and spiritual thrillers penned by Frank E. Peretti—a new generation of evangelicals proceeded judiciously. Employing lyrical metaphor and seeking cultural relevance and authenticity, Christian rockers engaged “postmodern” evangelical culture throughout the 1990s and beyond. A new breed of culture-savvy evangelicals—who tended to avoid topics such as spiritual warfare and the End of Days—replaced bands like Holy Soldier and Bloodgood. Jars of Clay and Sixpence None the Richer emphasized meekness, bringing kinder, gentler “culture warriors” into the social conversation. This “integrational” model of CCM, notes Jay R. Howard, best typifies those who seek to transform culture covertly. Put another way, while groups such as Jars of Clay are far from the “Jesus is returning soon” approach of the 1970s and ‘80s CCM, they are, nevertheless, exacting in their evangelical message.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s contemporary Christian musicians such as Larry Norman looked skyward—and their legacy continues to influence even artists who resist biblical literalism. But the paradigm appears to be shifting. Historian Stephen Prothero has noted Christian musician Steve Camp’s call for the Christian music industry to collectively repentant for its drift toward anthropocentrism; Camp argued that the industry has lost its Christocentric (even Heavenward) emphasis.

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Unlike early “Jesus musicians” of the 1970s, modern Christian rockers (at least in lyric) remain more focused on this world rather than the next. Along with Hal Lindsey’s work, Tim Lahaye’s widely successful book series *Left Behind* (1995-2007) titillated rapture-minded believers throughout the 1990s. But today’s evangelicals are (in some ways) inured to any claims about the end of time, particularly those rooted in certainty. Moreover, while a number of evangelicals of the past would have gladly basked in the possibilities associated with a doomsday orchestrated to favor the “chosen,” today’s evangelical (even the Rapture-minded) appear to exhibit a balance between cosmic hope and social justice.

Although Christian relief organizations such as Compassion International and World Vision have been long associated with the CCM universe, there is now a growing emphasis on humanitarianism, which evidences a fundamental shift in how eschatology is applied in daily life. In other words, the immediacy of the apocalyptic is placed squarely on the now rather than the later. But even though CC@M has evolved over the years (now deemphasizing eschatological immediacy) the apocalyptic impulse still remains. In its simplest form the meaning of the word “apocalyptic” is far more basic. Apocalyptic literature merely reveals *the hidden*. But in the United States, the term has been broadened and deepened, its roots traced to Judeo-Christian deterministic beliefs about teleology. As a result, the term is often associated with global events connected to the cosmic, its actual meaning relegated to a pedestrian lack-luster signifier. More to the point, music with roots in evangelical Christianity has always been *revelatory*, whether fantastic accounts of doomsday

are discussed or not. Christian pop music is often used for the worship of God, instruction on biblical narratives, or for unveiling or revealing the Christian message. Thus CCM is always about the apocalyptic.

Perhaps one of the more noteworthy examples of the changes taking place in the world of evangelical music (and its relationship to the apocalyptic imagination and music) is the Cornerstone Music Festival, an annual event sponsored by Jesus People USA (JPUSA). Edgy, subcultural, multicultural, even pluralist, Cornerstone signals changes in evangelical Christianity (Young, 2011) and changes in Christian rock, providing a gathering that “has absolutely challenged the CCM industry,” according to historian Mark Allan Powell (2006).



Images of Christian punkers at the Cornerstone Festival, an annual Christian rock event.

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While Jesus Movement veterans remain respectful (even ecumenical) when considering the church universal, many have been vocal about the failings of the “traditional” church. JPUSA and Christian leaders who attend Cornerstone have noted festivals that simply mirror the cultural mainstream—even when those festivals purport to *counter* mainstream society. Certainly those who represent both subcultural and mainstream expressions of the evangelical universe attend this event. However, at Cornerstone the net is cast wide as staff members seek to include as many forms and expressions as can be managed, to include a strange co-existence between punk rockers, metal heads, and “straights.” When considering the parent culture (establishment evangelicalism), Cornerstone can certainly be viewed as countercultural. But what is the festival countering? Are participants changing society, being changed, or simply experiencing something, if only briefly—that which they do not and cannot experience in the workaday world? Evangelical Christianity is built on a lengthy history of experiential religion, cultural accommodation, and acculturation. So what is the festival opposing?

According to sociologist Doug Rossinow, when one considers the 1960s and ‘70s, “a counterculture was, by definition, both marginal and oppositional” (Rossinow, 1998: 251). Cornerstone is both.

Conclusion

Apocalyptic music comes in many forms, and it will perhaps never lose its luster or its socio-cultural appeal. Tensions pertaining to the purpose of “sacred” musics of any genre notwithstanding, CCM has begun to fade into the grey of pluralism. Despite the fact that there exists a near recidivistic quality about the American millennialist, there remains a continued ecumenical effort, a collaboration to join with other persons of faith to realize the end of war, hunger, AIDS, and a new push toward environmentalism. And while there *was* a concerted effort in the past to demonize global humanitarian efforts as being futile at best or antichrist at worst, even Rapture-minded evangelicals admit (unlike their evangelical forerunners) that they simply do not know when “the end” will come.

Notes

1. David Bebbington has argued that that the principles of the Enlightenment made the rise of individualistic evangelical Christianity possible. Bebbington's "quadrilateral" (conversion, biblicism, crucicentrism, and activism) crystallizes his conception of both the heritage of the Reformation and the growth of holiness and pietistic movements in eighteenth and nineteenth-century American society. Bebbington provides a definition from which I can compare others. Mark Noll prefaces his definition of "evangelical" by suggesting a difference between historical definitions and categorical definitions. The "historical" simply refers to the genealogical organic lineage of any group which can be traced back to figures such as Jonathan Edwards, George Whitfield, or John Wesley. He considers the Reformation and Martin Luther's criteria for Christianity, but uses American revivalists as catalysts for what reformed leaders regard as a movement—evangelicalism as popular conservative Protestantism within the American context, later diverging from reformed theology. Evangelicalism is a complex network of bible colleges,

publishers and parachurch organizations, which hold to common traits. Thus the movement ("ISM") is somewhat nebulous; D.G. Hart and Jon R. Stone argue that evangelicalism is not a true movement. The "categorical" refers to five categories Noll uses to define evangelical belief: scripture (divine authority and foundation for faith and practice), experience of God (emphasis on encounter and heart-assurance), rejection of institutions (priesthood of all believers, personal hermeneutics), flexibility (evangelicals adjust to culture), and discipline (piety, holiness, tenacity). Nathan Hatch positions evangelical Christianity within the American context, arguing that both the revolutionary spirit of early America and the democratic impulse created a form of Christianity which valued free-will (a departure from Calvinism), anti-clerical, and populist hermeneutics. Thus, a rupture between cleric and commoner created a populist pope, each person their own theologian.

2. See Shires, Eskridge, Stowe, Miller, and Luhr.
3. "Jesus is Just Alright" was written by Arthur Reid Reynolds and first recorded in 1966. "Put Your Hand in the Hand" was written by Gene MacLellan.

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