# A Matrix of Tensions:
# *CCM* Magazine and the Creation of Evangelical Culture Warriors

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis, "A Matrix of Tensions: *CCM* Magazine and the Creation of Evangelical Culture Warriors," looks at the flagship publication of the contemporary Christian music industry during the 1990s. It argues that the magazine was a site of cultural formation where readers learned that to be a Christian was to be a white Republican, and that being a faithful believer meant engaging the secular culture by fighting for the white priorities of Republicans. Unlike other work done on the Christian music industry, this thesis centers the whiteness of the industry, not taking it for granted, but looking at how money, power, and privilege helped create a space where whiteness was institutionalized. Bringing together history, sociology, and media studies, "A Matrix of Tensions" shows how a generation of white teenagers was able to so fuse politics and faith that when they left one, the other also disappeared.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Growing up on the fundamentalist side of evangelical, I wasn't taught that I needed to go to college. After having kids and thinking about what I wanted to do with my life, I still thought I could self-educate myself and it would be sufficient. It wasn't until I discovered Rachel Held Evans that I realized I wanted to pursue formal training in writing and thinking, and she was that person who showed me it was ok, actually, for women to pursue, and even prioritize it.

I knew from the moment I registered for classes that I wanted to study evangelical pop culture, because it had been my space of cultural formation for 15 years. While there were things I loved about it, it also made me a harsh, unempathetic judge of others, impacting how I parented, how I voted, and how I thought about people of color. It did not turn me into a very good person. I wanted to understand why. How does a religion that spends so much time talking about the love of God also create people who are so ignorant and cruel? I couldn't blame MTV or bad books or bad music for the outcome. I couldn't really blame the public schools either, spending half of my education in private or homeschools.

My life had been consumed by evangelicalism, and as I reflected on it, I started to get the sense that maybe I had actually turned out the way that they had wanted. Maybe the evangelical project had been a success, and my inability to vote for Obama was what they had been hoping for all along.

This thesis is the culmination of thinking, reading, and writing about Christian music for five years, since I first realized in a race and space class that Christian music was more politically and racially charged than people gave it credit for. The past five years at UVA have been nearly everything I hoped an academic college experience would be. I'm especially grateful to Matt Hedstrom and Daryn Henry for giving me the freedom and encouragement to not only work out my residual anger at evangelicalism, but also to take the topic of Christian music seriously.

I'm also thankful to Leah Payne and Tim Dillinger for their encouragement and support as we write about this industry from the perspective of people who are not straight white men. But I'm also grateful to other scholars who have been generous with their time and encouragement and willingness to answer questions, and I'm happy to be contributing in a small way to the work that they have started – in particular, Randall Stephens, Andrew Hartman, Daniel Vaca, and Samuel Perry. It sounds silly, but since this is a cultural studies project, I'm also thankful for my Twitter feed

which is full of fascinating and supportive people and who remind me this work is worth doing – especially Cville Twitter, who know that what we believe directly impacts the way we live. And to Ben, thanks for everything.

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While it doesn't show up in the bibliography, everything here is underpinned by the multiple classes I've taken from the Carter G. Woodson Institute for African-American and African Studies. The faculty and coursework there gave me the solid foundation with which to examine the intricacies of white supremacy.

I also could not have gotten throughout the past 8 years without my kids' patience and willingness to become fantastically independent people – I almost feel bad that they are almost entirely responsible for doing their own laundry and cooking – but not quite. Alysa, Aiden, Baelin, Sydney, and Elias have been so thoughtful and supportive through this whole process, and I'm happy to have modeled a different version of motherhood than I received. And finally, everything in my life is so much better with Melissa Spencer, Rebecca Rainbow, and Gabby Paniagua-Stolz in it. Thanks for being my first string.

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*The way we wanted to influence culture may have been sort of like Christian nationalism.*

- John Styll

# INTRODUCTION

## That Everlasting Living Jesus Music

*I know…that writing disappears unless there is a response to it. – Barbara Christian*[1]

On the morning of September 11, 2001, Reunion Records released a collaborative album helmed by recording star Michael W. Smith. Called *Worship*, it was an album of worship songs sung by a choir made up of many members of the contemporary Christian music community.[2] In the documentary about the Christian music industry, *The Jesus Music*, Smith described the creation of the album. He said that early in 2001, he was woken from a dead sleep, the voice of God saying to him, "for such a time as this." He said that it felt like God was telling him to make a worship album, and he refused because he didn't want to do worship music. The voice repeated a couple of weeks later, he refused, and like the prophet Samuel, he said it happened a third time. Relenting, he said to God, "I'll do it. I'll make this first worship album." Then, of course, with the release when it was, Smith said he believed it was for that reason. *For such a time as this*.

Maybe God did speak to Smith. At the very least, it was highly coincidental. The jury is still out on what it might mean for Bob Dylan's *"Love and Theft"*, Nickelback's *Silver Side Up*, or Slayer's *God Hates Us All* albums to have also been released that same day. The narrative that Michael W. Smith created was a useable one. The documentary framed that album as the one that transitioned the industry to the worship music focus that it has today, and it makes sense that in the wake of tragedy, people would want worship music and not pop hits. But the archives of the Christian music industry reveal another story.

In the magazine of the Christian music industry, *CCM*, there was an interview with Michael W. Smith, back in 1993. In it he said, "I've always felt like I had a call on my life to lead worship, and I've talked about doing a worship album for seven or eight years."[3] He also, in 1998, released a compilation worship album, *Exodus,* making *Worship* not his first worship album. Additionally, in November 1999, the magazine ran an article about the new trend of worship music.[4] The movement

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[1] Barbara Christian, *The Race for Theory*, in Winston Napier, ed., *African American Literary Theory: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 288.
[2] "Michael W. Smith," Discogs, https://www.discogs.com/master/224655-Michael-W-Smith-Worship.
[3] "In the News," *CCM*, September 1993, 14.
[4] Lou Carlozo, "The Latest Craze," *CCM*, November 1999, 40.

did not start as a response to September 11th. Why would Smith manufacture a narrative that he had to have known was untrue?

Well, as God also told Samuel, "the Lord looks at the heart," but the researcher looks at the archives. In looking at the history of the Christian music industry, it is clear that Smith was not the first to use Christian music as a means of telling a particular story about the United States and its people. For starters, the story the Christian music industry tells about itself is that they were counter-cultural hippies, the Jesus People who became addicted to God instead of drugs. Surely that is part of the story, but the other part is that the creators of the industry were also white people, mostly men, coming out of the wealthiest, whitest parts of the country.[5] Even at the time, reporting on the movement said that "by far" the largest group of people in the movement were "the straight people…Middle America, campus types."[6] While the evangelical movement was fueled partly by apocalyptic visions according to which buying a house yielded feelings of despair at joining the establishment, it also was built on a white, conservative foundation of belief about what being a Christian in the United States should look like.[7] Many people have dismissed contemporary Christian music as simply being about Jesus, and therefore containing no deeper cultural messages.[8] But if believing in a white Jesus meant one voted like a white Jesus would, then music that proclaimed a white Jesus was inherently political. And the contours of that narrative can be seen in the pages of *CCM* magazine.

*CCM* magazine has not been studied academically before. The Christian music industry itself has rarely been taken seriously as a site of racial and political formation. Yet sites of cultural formation are where people learn how to live and struggle and build their society.[9] When examining white evangelicalism, the Christian music industry reveals much about how people came to understand themselves as white evangelicals. An analysis of the magazine reveals how that industry contributed to the cultivation of the culture wars of the 1990s and how teenagers came to understand that they served a God who was white and Republican.

The magazine was the flagship publication for the contemporary Christian music industry. It served as a platform for artists to explain themselves and their music and for cultural authorities to

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5 Part of what they were rebelling against was the Civil Rights Movement!
6 "The New Rebel Cry: Jesus Is Coming!," *Time*, June 21, 1971, 59.
7 April Hefner, "Don't Know Much 'Bout History," *CCM*, April 1996, 40.
8. McAlister, *The Kingdom of God Has No Borders*, 205.
9 Stuart Hall et al., *Cultural Studies* 1983: A Theoretical History, Stuart Hall, Selected Writings (Durham : London: Duke University Press, 2016).

explain why music was important and the role it should play in people's lives. Previous histories of the industry have mentioned the magazine briefly, covering a radio program that that was foundational to the magazine and industry, jumping to the date of magazine creation and then into various developments of it throughout the years. The histories contained within the magazine itself, while valuable and helpful, are more about the artists and changing trends in the industry, not as much about politics, and even less about race. This thesis closely analyzed 45 *CCM* magazine issues from 1989-2001, drawn from an archive of issues spanning 1989-2008.[10] This research was complimented by two interviews with the publisher of the magazine, John Styll, totaling 2.5 hours.

This project tells the comprehensive history of how the magazine was founded in chapter 1, contextualizing its beginnings in Orange County. It then briefly compares it to the Republican Party and how political efforts paralleled the magazine's history, concluding with an example that clearly represents that effort. Styll created the magazine as a Christian product, not an evangelical one. He and his staff always saw it as being broader than the evangelical world, saying "we weren't denominational because we didn't want to be - we wanted to be inclusive. We didn't want to be exclusive. We didn't want to alienate anybody by staking a claim in some sort of theological area, except in a very general sense." Yet, as chapter 2 shows, part of what made it evangelical in practice was the way that whiteness, and in particular the ideology of colorblindness, functioned in the magazine. While *CCM* worked to cultivate nuance and a less dogmatic faith in its readers, it also became a space for racial and political dogmatism to flourish. Partly because the magazine strove for an objective perspective, they allowed artists to speak freely and did not pass judgment on what they said.[11] As a historical archive, this makes *CCM* an excellent window into the culture in which it existed. But as a space of personal and collective formation, by allowing an open forum and not seeing the world of whiteness in which they operated, the magazine also provided space for the cultivation of white culture warriors, and the way the warrior identity developed is shown in chapter 3.

It can be embarrassing to have grown up in the evangelical subculture in a way that isn't for other subcultural groups. There are probably many reasons for it, but surely one is the awareness that it mostly isn't something to be proud of. While the industry has always been ignored or even ridiculed by secular culture (which is frequently lamented in the magazine) the fact of the matter is

10. As part of the research I also digitally scanned in 95 issues. Archive located at William Smith Morton Library at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virgina.

11 Styll, interview.

that it was a very financially successful industry. If Christian music didn't matter, then why was so much money, effort, and thought put into not only the music but the magazine? The negative outcomes from being a part of this subculture were invested in by religious and political leaders.

Evangelicals were people who wanted to change the world. They, more than any other American religious group, believed that living "radically differently from mainstream America" while working for political change was the way to change American society.[12] Additionally, they put a lot of time and energy into raising their children also to be evangelical Christians, seeing church youth groups and related organizations as important tools in keeping them in the church.[13] They also believed that "to influence the world, one must sustain ongoing interaction with it."[14] This combination of being radically different, a youth focus, and interaction with the world meant that youth-oriented industries sprang up which became factions of the culture wars.

*CCM* is a useful site for observing how the culture wars of the 1990s were present in the contemporary Christian music industry, because it was the primary publication for that world. By nature of the form, magazines "promote discourses," that people collectively use in solving social issues. This is an effort "in which media, government, and the citizenry reciprocally influence one another," culminating in agenda building.[15] The cultural fights are not the main thrust of the content in the magazine, but their appearance is a persistent one, and these political undercurrents give weight to the other faith-based content, which is the majority of the magazine.

Magazine researchers believe that magazines, as texts of pop culture, are a powerful pedagogical tool; they are sites of education where the producers serve as teachers to the audience-students.[16] When people flip through the pages, they are learning from what the writers and publishers felt important enough to include. As magazine researchers have shown, teaching and learning are inherent to the magazine form.[17] One primary way magazines try to appeal to readers is by helping them be a better version of themselves.[18] The question always is, what does a better version look like? The cultural environment in which the learning occurs shapes these goals and lessons. As Styll said, "we weren't out there to promote an evangelical viewpoint, but that was the

12. Christian Smith, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 37.
13. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 51.
14. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 85.
15. David Weiss and Miglena Sternadori, "Viewing the Magazine Form Through the Lens of Classic Media Theories," in The Handbook of Magazine Studies, ed. Miglena Sternadori and Tim Holmes, 1st ed. (Wiley, 2020), 58.
16. Miglena Sternadori, "Magazines as Sites of Didacticism, Edutainment, and (Sometimes) Pedagogy," in The Handbook of Magazine Studies, ed. Miglena Sternadori and Tim Holmes, 1st ed. (Wiley, 2020), 278-279.
17. Sternadori, 289.
18. Sternadori, 278.

sea we were swimming in…We knew where the bread was buttered." When the collective interactive discourse occurs, when agendas are built, and when people are trying to improve, the worldview of both the magazine and its audience becomes significant.

One of the things that researchers of evangelicalism and evangelical pop culture miss is that even though most Christian music was about faith and Jesus, there was a consistent subtext to the 'living out the faith' that was informed by the political culture. "A lot of the music was so exclusive lyrically and musically, honestly, that only hardcore Christians could possibly enjoy it. Because the way lyrics were expressed - if you if you know. If you are Christian, then you completely understand the language."[19] Understanding the political context of the times makes clear that the spiritual messages about standing up to Satan, or being a faithful follower of Jesus had real-world cultural implications and political consequences. There was a common understanding about what this language meant that was created through the content of the magazine.

Historian Andrew Hartman said that part of why American society became so secularized in the 20th century was because of waning religious authority. This lack of authority helped to imbue the magazine with even more, since it became one of the few places where leaders were clearly talking about what a faithful Christian life should look like for teens.[20] In *CCM*, readers learned that an ideal version of a Christian was one who adheres to evangelicalism's theological and political priorities. Styll admitted to that, saying "back then, I think we were probably more in sync with the mentality that if you are Christian, you are for certain things and against certain things." As an educational tool, the 'learning environment' of a magazine is the sociocultural context in which it is produced, which makes the 1990s world of political activism and culture warring influential, even if the producers of the magazine didn't intend for it to be so.

John Styll and the others at the magazine were aware of their position of authority in the industry. They thoughtfully wrestled with everything that went into the publication, as they worked to balance all of the competing interests. They thought about the cultural and theological aspects of the music and what it meant to have 'Christian' music, and they thought about it in an entertainment sense, and they also thought about the financial aspect. "We had to navigate all of it. And be as broad as we could be because had we taken a more sharpened point of view, it would have limited the audience. We couldn't afford to do that."[21] They were critical but pragmatic.

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[19] Styll, interview.

20. Andrew Hartman, A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars, Paperback edition (Chicago London: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 79.

21 Styll, interview.

Christian music of the 1990s was the glue that connected all the disparate parts of evangelical culture. Artists performed at arena events with Orange County evangelists like Greg Laurie, they showed up at conservative rallies in D.C. and they shared stages with preachers, conservative activists, and politicians. They went to high schools, youth groups, published books and devotionals, and modeled what a faithful follower of Jesus looked like. In the histories of the contemporary Christian music industry that do exist, most authors give a caveat that it was a predominantly white industry, but they rarely interrogate why that was or how it was built.

The publication staff of *CCM* worked to broaden the possibilities of what Christian music could do. "Our mantra internally was give the audiences enough of what we know they want so that we can give them what we think they need."[22] This caused tension because they were working within a cultural environment that was trying to narrow the possibilities of how Christians could live. As Styll explained, "it wasn't our agenda that was being pursued. It was sort of what was happening then. I think I see that more clearly now than I did then. But yeah, I mean, Christian equaled Republican back then."[23] While viewing themselves as a Christian and not simply an evangelical publication, the world the magazine circulate in was Evangelical, and nearly entirely white. Because of the magazine's cultural authority, it was effective in participating in the larger project of creating a white evangelical collective identity through its public of readers. But because the creators of the magazine were in the same white cultural waters of its readers, they did not realize the racial formation occurring in all of them.

Ultimately the evangelical cultural air of the 1990s shaped the magazine as much as the magazine tried to shape the culture. Styll said, "we told the story of contemporary Christian music in real time." They did do that. But they also, thankfully, unwittingly told the story of the evangelically politicized 1990s.

[22] Styll, interview.
[23] Styll, interview.

# 1. Revival in the Land: White History and White Politics

*The personal is political.* – The Combahee River Collective

The cover of the 1984 issue of *CCM* was one of the very rare occasions when it was not a recording artist featured. Instead, the person on the front was Christina DeLorean, wife of the car maker John DeLorean. They were interviewed by Styll and his wife, John DeLorean while he was in prison, about his supposed conversion to Christianity while dealing with the fallout of drugs and struggles with his company. The readers didn't particularly like the story and wanted music to be the focus of the magazine. But it wouldn't be the last time that DeLorean intersected with Styll. In the late 1990s, in the midst of significant financial issues, DeLorean lost his 434 acre estate in New Jersey and went bankrupt. He had been hoping to turn part of his property into a golf course in order to avoid losing everything, but it never panned out. The idea of a golf course, though, seemed to be a good one. After his property went up for auction in 1999, investors wanted to purchase it in order to build it. One of those investors was a venture capitalist, Christopher C. Dewey, whose name had been on the masthead of *CCM* since the 1980s, as 'chairman of the board.' Needing money to invest in the property, Dewey sold the magazine. It turned out to be for naught, though. The venture capitalists were never able to make the golf course a reality. So, in 2002, the property in Bedminster, New Jersey was sold once again, this time to Donald Trump, where he would indeed finally build a golf course.[24]

This chapter is about the history of *CCM* magazine and the way its story also paralleled the evangelical relationship with the Republican Party. The history of *CCM* was so entangled with the founding of modern evangelicalism and the Christian music industry that even as it tried to broaden the shape of both, financial dynamics ensured that the magazine would stay evangelical, white, and politically conservative. This chapter covers the history of the magazine, from its founding during the Jesus Movement in Orange County, using Darren Dochuck and Lisa McGirr to help explain the significance of that location, to the ending of its print run in 2008. It includes the

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[24] Styll, interview.
John Styll, "From There to Here," *CCM Magazine*, April 1, 2008, https://www.ccmmagazine.com/features/from-there-to-here/.
Bill Bowman, "Builder Digs for Gold in Bedminster Golf Stakes," *The Courier-News*, October 27, 2002., 31.

history of John Styll to show how embedded in southern California history the magazine was, which contributed to its later tensions. It also looks at the big picture of the Republican Party during these decades, showing how the content and changes of the magazine paralleled conservative political efforts. It ends by looking at an example of those efforts, showing how the magazine at times actively participated in the culture wars.

## ORANGE COUNTY

The magazine was primarily founded by John Styll and his personal history illuminates how evangelical pop culture overlaps with academic histories of evangelical political culture, showing how Christian music had political sides to it. As Darren Dochuck explained in *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt*, people flocked from places like Arkansas and Oklahoma to southern California, largely from the 1930s to the 60s, reshaping southern California in the mold of southern religion and values, and Styll exemplifies this phenomenon.[25]

Southern California's transformation, which would take a couple of generations, would eventually spread eastward to change the nation. John Styll's version of this story followed the same trajectory and it began at the end of the 19th century. It was 1896 when his grandfather Edmon Eastman Styll was born in Tennessee, moving to Oklahoma by the time he was 16, before moving west in 1930 to Los Angeles with his wife and children.[26] His son Marshall Styll grew up in the Bell area of Los Angeles, serving in World War Two and receiving a Purple Heart.[27] Marshall graduated from Pepperdine College, and eventually became a business executive. Los Angeles voter registration records show that in 1950, Edson, his wife Verona, and Marshall were all registered Democrats. But as Dochuck showed, a shift happened around 1960 in this part of California, namely explosive population growth to the south of Los Angeles in Orange County, which became the center of the modern Republican party. In 1958 Marshall and his wife Earla moved from Los Angeles County to Costa Mesa in Orange County, and Marshall changed his political affiliation to Republican in time for the 1960 elections (Earla had been a registered Republican since she was old

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[25] Darren Dochuk, From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism, 1. ed (New York, NY: Norton, 2011).

26. Edson E. Styll, "U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards," 1918-1917, Ancestry Library.
Edson Eastman Styll, "U.S., World War II Draft Registration Cards," 1942, Ancestry Library.
"Marshall James Styll," November 26, 2011, https://obits.ocregister.com/us/obituaries/orangecounty/name/marshall-styll-obituary?id=20064920.

27. "Marshall James Styll".

enough to vote in the early 50s). While they were not evangelicals, the Styll family story mirrored hundreds of thousands of others, and in this way, the conservative world of Orange County began.

The Stylls were not alone in moving out from Los Angeles to Orange County. Housing ads in Orange County newspapers from the late 1950s revealed just how much growth was occurring. For years there were ads extolling the virtues of subdivisions such as Lido Isle, Newport Beach, Balboa, Irvine Terrace, or Corona. Yet this growth was intentionally and primarily white.[28] In 1961, a Black doctor filed a lawsuit in Orange County because he was denied buying a home because of his race. His hope was to break the racial barrier in home-buying in Orange County.[29] He had reason to believe that it was racially motivated because throughout the 1950s, "many communities in Orange County prohibited renting or selling property to non-white residents."[30] In addition to this, voters in California voted in 1964 on Proposition 14 which would nullify the state's 1963 fair housing law. Orange County was the second largest county to vote in support of the proposition, with nearly 78% of voters voting yes. It was not simply happenstance that Orange County turned out to be so white in the 1960s.

The Styll family was deeply embedded in this white world of Orange County. Marshall and Earla had three children, John, Jamie, and Susan. Marshall worked for manufacturing companies such as Cimco and Datanetics, where he was vice-president and then president in 1970.[31] The Stylls were regular members at St. Andrews Presbyterian Church for decades, the children attending Newport Harbor High School just a few blocks from their home, and they enjoyed a typical 1960s upper middle-class life. John graduated in 1969 from Newport Harbor before attending college at Orange Coast College and California State Fullerton, and he would later acknowledge in the magazine that he grew up in a white world.

In fact, Southern California was the most segregated area in the entire country.[32] In 1970, Orange County was 86% white, and a 1969 *Newsweek* article about Orange County described it as "the heartland of American political reaction," and their description of what that meant was "white racism."[33] Six weeks earlier, the *Los Angeles Times* ran an article where they interviewed five Black

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28. Some neighborhoods were explicitly still racially exclusive in their newspaper ads such as Cambridge Estates. "Quality Lots," Newport Harbor News Press, April 21, 1955.
J. Morgan Kousser, "Racial Injustice and the Abolition of Justice Courts in Monterey County," 44-52.
29. The Los Angeles Times. "Denied House, Negro Doctor Charges in Suit," July 1, 1961.
30. Human Relations, OC. "Orange County Civil Rights: A History of an Enduring Struggle for Equality," n.d.
31. Datanetics made keyboards, one of which was used in the very first Apple computer built by Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs.
32. Dochuck, 172.
33. "The Orange County Bug." Stewart Alsop. Newsweek ; New York Vol. 73, Iss. 26, June 30, 1969, 96.

people on what it was like being Black in Orange County.[34] One man, a college educated musician with teaching experience could only find a job as a janitor, saying "white clubs in Orange County don't want no black audiences." He was a witness to the Central High School integration in Little Rock and moved to California for the freedom and opportunities, but, "out here, they smile and say being black hasn't got anything to do with it, but…you don't get the job and you know its 'cause you're black." The article interviewed people with a range of infuriating experiences, all best summed up by one man who said, "I've done everything the white man says I'm supposed to do…and it still ain't enough.[35]" That whiteness of Orange County would have religious and political consequences.

A Republican Party stronghold, Orange County attracted people who didn't mind segregated ways of life, and "once there, they often moved further to the right."[36] The residents of Orange County were also not afraid to be activists for their causes. The John Birch Society was often featured in Orange County newspapers in the 60s and 70s.[37] In 1973, the North Orange County YWCA held seminars "dealing with the elimination of local racism."[38] And in 1979, the *Los Angeles Times* printed an article of Orange County parents and politicians protesting busing to integrate the schools in in the Los Angeles area.[39] As historian Rick Perlstein explained, the popular understanding of social geography was that California was America, but "more so," and that Orange County was California, "only more so.[40]" This social geography would also affect the country culturally.

In the midst of that well-educated, wealthy whiteness of Southern California in the 1960s and 70s, "a search for authenticity, the rejection of liberal rationality, a middle-class counterrevolution against 1960s 'permissiveness,' and a search for community," led to a new religious movement.[41] From the heart of Orange County, California came the Jesus People, and from them came the contemporary Christian music industry. Central to the story of the Jesus Movement was the church Calvary Chapel. Calvary was pastored by Chuck Smith, whose son Chuck Smith Jr. was friends with Styll, attending the same high school and participating in various activities

34. (which the paper described as one of the wealthiest and best-educated counties in the country)
35. David Shaw. "5 Viewpoints: What It Is To Be Black In This County." *Los Angeles Times*, May 11, 1969.
36. Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 125.
37. The Newport Harbor Ensign was actually published by a member of the society.
38. 'Imperative Week': YWCA Seminars Aimed at Racism Los Angeles Times; Oct 21, 1973; pg. OC_A8.
39. Legislators Lend Their Support: 250 Rally to Oppose Busing in County *Los Angeles Times*; Jan 27, 1979; pg. OC_A12.
40. Perlstein, 124.
41. Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*, New edition, Politics and Society in Twentieth-Century America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 243.

together.[42] The conservative beliefs that Chuck Smith had at Calvary Chapel "laid the ideological base for a thoroughly conservative politics," and this contributed to the creation of a music industry that was also conservative and white.[43]

The Jesus Movement, despite originating with counter-cultural hippies, was actually very conservative, and very white. As Dochuck explained, the Jesus people had the same conservative, fundamentalist, capitalist views of their parents.[44] This world created modern evangelicalism, and the foundation was whiteness. As Lisa McGirr described in her book *Suburban Warriors*, which traced the conservative political history of Orange County, at the center of the Jesus Movement's popularity "was an effort by middle-class men and women to assert their sense of a properly ordered world - one they felt was threatened by sexual liberation, the women's movement, the burgeoning Left, and the youth culture movements - by championing family values, authority, and tradition backed by the authority of the 'word of God.'"[45] This assertion of a properly ordered world would be central to not only the megachurches and televangelists emerging from this space, but also the Christian music industry. While the music itself would emerge out of Calvary Chapel, the magazine that would give the industry its shape, boundaries, and a platform for artists to explain themselves and their music got its start in the youth group meetings at St. Andrews Presbyterian Church in Newport Beach.

### JOHN STYLL

John Styll got his start in the music industry through audio production. With four friends from his church, they voluntarily modified their youth group announcements, which were normally read aloud. Instead, they recorded the announcements and added sound effects and music, and it was an instant success. Styll credits his "savvy" youth pastor Eric 'Kim' Strutt with giving him "the desire to see Christians on the leading edge in the arts, media, and entertainment," because "by the time I was a high school junior in the late '60s, I was becoming aware of popular culture's tremendous influence on society's attitudes and behavior."[46] Soon they had created an in-house radio station for a few local high schools where they played music during lunch, and eventually he took over his

42. Greg Laurie also attended the same school, a couple of years behind, but Styll wasn't friends with him. "Of course at that time I didn't know to know him."
43. McGirr, 247.
44. Dochuk, 316.
45. McGirr, 243.
46. John Styll, "A Magazine Is Born," July 1998, 7.
"Rev. Dr Eric Kimball 'Kim' Strutt" (The Burbank Leader, January 2, 2016), https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/burbankleader/obituary.aspx?n=eric-kimball-strutt-kim&pid=177110912.

sister's unused 6x10 playhouse in the backyard, turning it into a recording studio. Through this experience, Styll and his friends began making contacts with local radio stations, as well as getting on the promotional distribution list for label companies, building up an extensive library of albums. Eventually, the five men formed a non-profit company called Master Productions to continue creating spiritual audio productions, renting an office in Costa Mesa, thanks to a local businessman paying half their rent. With a mention in the national magazine *Faith at Work*, orders began coming in from other churches.[47] As president of Master Productions, Styll's 19-year-old dreams were bigger than just producing music recordings. He was hoping to have a "commercial radio station, studio facilities for producing television shows and films, in addition to a publishing house," all in order to spread the gospel.[48] His desire was to "convey their Christian message in language understood by today's young people," and this has always been Styll's goal, saying today, "I have always been about trying to connect the gospel message to the culture." This experience helped prepare Styll for the new world of Christian music.

The office that Master Productions was renting space in also housed a tape duplicating company called ProMedia, and this was where Styll worked. As part of that job he duplicated tapes including sermons by Chuck Smith. Eventually Master Productions ended, but Styll continued to work at ProMedia, even building a recording studio there. In 1974, Jim Willems, a "very active member" of Calvary Chapel and the owner of the Christian bookstore Maranatha Village, came to ProMedia wanting to get a radio show produced so that he could promote the new 'Jesus Music' to the general public, as well as make a profit from it.[49]

At the time, there were no Christian music radio stations for the new music; Christian radio was southern gospel and preachers. But with the goal of selling albums in his store, Willems had bought an hour of time on the AM radio station KGER in Long Beach during the 3:00-4:00 afternoon drive time. After Willems went to ProMedia, the radio show he wanted to create ended up being hosted and produced by Styll, and they called it "Hour of Praise." Running for over a year, "we played as contemporary music as we could get away with." And as Willems had hoped, the radio play also increased album sales at Marantha Village.[50]

In this way, Styll drifted from St. Andrews and became connected to Calvary Chapel. Styll eventually became a partner with Willems and another man, Steve Zarit, founding a company

47. "John Hardy, "Electronic Gospel," The Newport Harbor Ensign, August 5, 1971.
48. John Hardy, "Electronic Gospel Ministry," The Newport Harbor Ensign, July 29, 1971.
49. Styll, interview.
50. Steve Emmons, "Young Christians: New Force in the Marketplace," The Los Angeles Times, July 20, 1975.

together called Praise Productions. Praise Productions worked to spread and promote the Jesus music. They produced various audio projects like radio shows and commercials. They were also consultants to theme parks for their Christian music nights and produced their commercials, Styll the voice in commercials for Knotts Berry Farms Christian music nights. When Disney began doing them as well he also did the voice work for those. Because Styll, as a Presbyterian, was so new to the world of Jesus Music, when he did Hour of Praise, someone else picked the music. As he said, "I had never heard of the Bill Gaither Trio," one of the most well-known southern gospel groups. He learned of the new music as it was released because he was now a part of Calvary Chapel. "Hour of Praise" ended when they found an FM station who would carry their feed for five hours in the afternoon. In order to make that happen, Styll personally built a recording studio inside the Marantha Village bookstore, and through a high-quality telephone line, KMAX in Pasadena played the new Christian music program as a Praise Production product.

While they were doing that, things were changing in the world of Christian radio stations, especially in Southern California. There was a rock station in nearby Santa Ana that was struggling to compete because of all the radio stations in the greater Los Angeles area. So in 1975 it made the switch to religious music, becoming one of the first Christian radio stations in the country, with the call letters KYMS - Khristian Youth Music Station.[51] Willems was the first advertiser on KYMS when it switched over. He bought two hours of airtime daily in exchange for the ability to sell ads on it.[52] Arnie McClatchey, the station manager for KYMS in its first several years, said that for the Christians of Orange County, "KYMS quickly became their station." This, too, increased record sales at Marantha Village, where they rose 25% in the first month after being on KYMS.[53] Since a full-time Christian radio station now existed, Praise Productions stopped running their KMAX feed, but Styll's production experience would increase.

Around this same time in the spring of 1975, Calvary Chapel began having Saturday night concerts with 3-4000 people in attendance.[54] These concerts were broadcast live on KYMS, with Styll as the host. He then also began hosting the Sunday morning and Sunday evening Calvary Chapel church services.[55] Styll's last big audio production project during those years was for a program called Innervision. It was a two hour program for a soft rock FM station in Los Angeles,

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51. Paul Baker, Contemporary Christian Music Where It Came From, What It Is, Where It's Going (Crossway Books, Westchester, Illinois, 1985).
52. Steve Emmons, "Young Christians: New Force in the Marketplace," The Los Angeles Times, July 20, 1975.
53. Orange Coast Daily Pilot. "Religion on the Air," June 1, 1975. P B 1.
54. Orange Coast Daily Pilot. "Religion on the Air," June 1, 1975. P B 1.
55. Meeting his wife Linda through the bookstore, Styll was also married in 1975 at Calvary Chapel by Chuck Smith.

KPOL that wanted a blend of Christian and mainstream music to surround their required public service messages. Styll hosted that show, playing a wide variety of music from Steely Dan to Daniel Amos, "being consistent with my whole worldview" of mixing faith with culture. The producer of that program and the one who chose the music for it was a former Jesus Music band member named Thom Granger. Styll said of him, "Thom has always been superior to me in his knowledge of music." Styll would remember this knowledge when it came time for his next venture.

### *CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN MUSIC* MAGAZINE

It was not an intentional decision to start the magazine. One of Styll's partners in Praise Productions, Steve Zarit, published the local penny-saver newspaper in Orange County. He had also started another publication in that same folded-newsprint style for Christian topics called *Contemporary Christian Acts*. As McGirr described it, it was "a publication for and about the fundamentalist community that offered its followers advice on 'the caliber of men Christians should vote for.'"[56] The three men brought this paper into Praise Productions, and because Styll had music experience, he became the editor of the music section. Not long after that, they realized the music section should become its own publication. They envisioned it as an industry trade paper for radio, retail, artists, and concert promoters.[57] Before beginning it though, they first did market research. Styll went around the country meeting record label executives, pitching the idea of a Christian music industry magazine, and for the most part, the response was positive. Based on the name Zarit had created, they called the new publication *Contemporary Christian Music*.

With no publishing experience, Styll learned on the job how to create a magazine. Initially, it was formatted the same way, in the tabloid newspaper format with the same design, fonts, and similar sections. Record labels bought advertising which created enough revenue to pay for the printing of the magazine and the small staff, as well as the initial 12,000 copies given out for free to those whom they saw as their target audience. The magazine "was more or less self-funded," but did quickly begin to charge for subscriptions.[58] The first issue of *CCM* magazine came out in July 1978. Styll said, "I do have a memory of when we finally got the first issue out. And I thought, I don't know if we could ever do that again. That was so hard."[59] The magazine changed shape as they

56. McGirr, 259.
57. Styll, interview.
58. Styll, interview.
59. Styll, interview.

continued to create it month after month. By 1979, the magazine had become an unfolded newsprint magazine, and by the end of that year it was being printed on glossy paper. It wasn't until 1981 that the magazine changed to a standard magazine format. As if in recognition of how the fledgling Christian music industry had needed a publication, Styll was already being called on to help define the direction of the industry.[60]

One of the things Styll always prioritized with the magazine was editorial integrity. In 1979 Styll bought out Willems and Zarit and started his own company, CCM Communications. "Part of the reason that I bought the magazine…was because there was a conflict in agendas. There was a push sometimes to do things editorially that benefited the retail store."[61] Styll's goal with the magazine was to do "real journalism and present both sides and present things with an attitude of neutrality…We always thought about trying to make people think…How can we get them to think more seriously about their faith and about our culture, and we tried to use the magazine to do that."[62] The same yearning that animated the Jesus people - the desire to make Jesus culturally relevant - also animated the founding of the magazine.

The magazine had a low staff turnover, and it was started by a core group of white men. While Styll was the editor, advertising director, and principal writer, he brought in a few other people who were experts in their fields. One of them was Thom Granger, whom he brought on as an editor.[63] Another was Don Cusic, a Nashville resident, who was a columnist. "We needed a guy who had boots on the ground there to write a column about what's happening," because the magazine wanted to focus what was going on in Nashville in addition to the east and west coasts. Cusic would eventually write a comprehensive biography of the Christian music industry. The third person Styll brought in was another Jesus People musician, John Fischer.[64] Through his roommate, Styll was made aware of John Fischer and managed to meet him. A musician, he was also "one of those counterculture guys…he came from what to us was really good theology, and he seemed like a really good new kind of guy who wasn't like the rest, and so I felt he had an air of authority about him." Fischer was brought in specifically to write the closing column for each issue.

The men who started the magazine all shared the same perspective on the goals of the magazine, which were targeted towards the music industry. "If we were trying to do something, it

60. Steve Rabey, "Sound and Vision," *CCM*, July 1993.
61. Styll, interview.
62. Styll, interview.
63. Styll, interview.
64. Fischer is technically the first person to have a contemporary Christian music album released.

was to make the industry different…Our goal was to make them better at what they did. We were going to provide them tools and resources so that they could improve how they sounded if they are a radio station, or how they sold music if they are a retailer because we felt that would aid in them having an impact on the culture."[65] The magazine though, quickly turned into a magazine for the fans more than for the industry, and as it changed, it also became more professional.

Styll and the others worked to learn how to create a successful publication. "I would go to conferences. We subscribed to a publication called *Folio*, which was for magazine people. Learning the latest technology and how things worked - I had set about to learn how it really got done in the real world…We learned pretty fast, because you had to learn fast or die…As we matured and grew, it became a more sophisticated sort of an operation. Just from even selling into retail stores, that was a whole other business. We were the best selling Christian magazine in Christian stores. That was hard to do."[66] As they matured and grew, the name of the magazine changed as well. From 1978-1983 it was *Contemporary Christian Music*, from 1983 to 1986 when it was broader, it was *Contemporary Christian Magazine*, going back to *Contemporary Christian Music* until 1998, when it officially became *CCM*.[67] Even in the years when it had a longer name, it was almost always abbreviated in the magazine text as *CCM*.

Although it changed throughout the years, the magazine had a fairly constant structure to it.[68] Sections in every issue included "On the Beat," which was a round-up of everything that was going on with various artists over the past month, where they appeared on tv, what noteworthy events they appeared at, what they might be working on in the studio, all subdivided by genre. There was also "In the News," which was more in-depth coverage of a couple items that would have been in "On the Beat," "What's New," covering new artists, as well as various columnists, interviews, album reviews, and pragmatic and popular things like concert listings and concert reviews. One of the things that helped the magazine be successful is that it contained information, like concert information, that people couldn't find anywhere else.[69]

Most of the content in the magazine throughout the years was written and edited by white people. While there were a fair amount of women employees and writers, they were also white. This reflected how *CCM* was a white institutional space, "created through a process that begins with

65. Styll, interview.
66. Styll, interview.
67. "CMnexus: The Magazine Index of Modern Music and Christianity," n.d., http://cmnexus.org/magazines/CCM.
68. John Styll, "Intro," CCM, March 1992, 4.
69. Styll, interview.

whites excluding people of color, either completely or from institutional positions of power, during a formative period in the history or an organization. During this period, whites populate all influential posts within the institution and create institutional logics…which embed white norms into the fabric of the institution's structure and culture."[70] The creation of *CCM* was directly related to the Orange County environment that it and the music industry developed in.

Not only did white men shape the internal contents of the magazine, but they were also the most frequently seen people on the front cover. Of the top 10 artists who appeared most frequently on the cover, Amy Grant and Michael W. Smith were tied for the record, appearing 13 times each. Collectively, because some of the artists were bands made up of multiple people, there were 26 men and six women who were the most featured people on the magazine covers, all of them white except for one Black man.[71] These statistics show the white institutionalization of the industry, but they also helped to visually say that the Christian music industry was by and large for white people.

The magazine was thoughtful about its content, though. When it came to choosing who to put on the cover, they tried to "find the subject we think will appeal to the most possible people, but also artists who have something new or interesting to say. We also try to achieve a balanced mix of musical styles over the course of a year."[72] In deciding the content of the magazine, Styll and his editors paid attention to what was going on in the industry, and what was going to be happening. They knew which albums would be released a few months ahead of time, and they paid attention to radio and sales charts to see what fans were interested in. The page length of the magazine varied by issue, because it was determined by the number of advertisers in each issue.[73] Styll said, "There's a ratio that we had to have to make it work financially…and we never knew until each month what the ad content was going to be."[74]

The issue of advertising was a constant tension Styll had to balance. Not only did he need to keep his readers as subscribers, the radio stations and the labels also weighed in. The radio station group WAY-FM published an open letter to the industry at one point, calling them to write more songs that were explicitly about Jesus.[75] The professional opinions mattered, because money mattered. At one point, "we had Sparrow Records stop advertising with us for a couple of years

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70. J. Russell Hawkins, The Bible Told Them so: How Southern Evangelicals Fought to Preserve White Supremacy (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), note 103 on 189.
71. Who, very interestingly, turned out to be a Trump supporter.
72. John Styll, "Intro," CCM, March 1992, 4.
73. John Styll, "Intro," CCM, April 1992, 4.
74. Styll, interview.
75 "An Open Letter to The Christian Music Community," CCM, May 1996.

because they were mad at us. They didn't think their artists were getting enough covers. And so if they stopped advertising, that's a real world consequence to an editorial decision. And it can, if you're not careful, influence your editorial decisions…but we never did that. We, even in the face of that very difficult time with Sparrow, kept covering our artists like we always did, to the best of our ability of making independent editorial decisions. They eventually came back. But it was it was costly." Styll added, "we never made an editorial decision based on advertising, and nobody ever got coverage because they advertised." The magazine grew and as time went on, Styll was able to have people to take care of circulation and advertising, and his role was focused on running the business and doing interviews.[76]

During the 1980s, the magazine experimented and found its footing, and firmly established itself as the magazine for the industry. While the magazine was developing, so was the Christian music industry. With modern Christian music established as a genre by this time and the industry growing, Christian labels invested in better production, marketing, and publicity, and the result was improved quality of the music.[77] During that time, the magazine experimented, trying to be a broader pop culture magazine. Part of that was due to the 1983 recession; with sales falling, Styll learned from what *Rolling Stone* was doing and broadened the coverage to include films, books, politics, social issues. But the audience response wasn't what they had hoped for and, by November 1986, the magazine returned to solely covering music.[78] Despite that setback, the magazine continued to succeed. Within a few years of beginning, circulation had escalated to 25,000.[79] By the magazine's fifth anniversary in 1983, most of the business coverage had been removed, but by the middle of 1986, the industry needed more than monthly sales charts, so Styll created a separate weekly industry newsletter called *CCM Update*. An 8-16 page newsletter, depending on the amount of advertising, "it had the definitive charts and industry news, and it was the most current way to keep up to date with things."[80] The news was typed up on Thursday night, mailed on Friday morning, and was in mailboxes on Monday morning. This allowed the magazine to became more focused on music for a general audience while still being helpful to the industry at large. And in 1989, the magazine made the move from southern California to Nashville, where the rest of the

76. Styll, interview.
77. Steve Rabey, "Sound and Vision," CCM, July 1993.
78 John Styll, "From There to Here," CCM Magazine, April 1, 2008, https://www.ccmmagazine.com/features/from-there-to-here/.
79. Doug Trouten, "Cover to Cover," CCM, July 1998.
80. Styll, interview.

industry was also converging.[81]

The 1990s were considered the high point of the pop world of contemporary Christian music, and the magazine was influential and successful during these years as well. This was when money also entered the picture in a significant way. The industry underwent dramatic changes when secular music labels began buying out the Christian labels, incorporating them as divisions within their larger companies. To reflect this, *Billboard* started publishing Christian and gospel charts, and the general market media began giving Christian artists more coverage.[82] The result of this was an infusion of money into the industry, with the pop genre especially becoming more professional and, thanks to marketing deals with the larger companies, sales increased. In 1995, CCM album and concert sales grossed $1 billion, or 10% of the entire music industry.[83] Similarly, the magazine continued to grow, and this was indicative of longer page lengths, thanks to increasing advertisements, as well as increased subscribers. The growth of the magazine culminated in 1998 with the 20th anniversary, and the subscribers passed the 100,000 mark, probably closer to 150-200,000 subscribers by the late 1990s.[84]

The magazine and the music industry as a whole spent a lot of time talking about the ministry aspect of what they did. But the magazine was first and foremost a business. It was part of a larger industry that was part of "a capitalistic logic."[85] CCM researcher John Lindenbaum wrote about the geopolitical aspect of contemporary Christian music, and as part of that he wrote about how it was impossible to separate the industry from the business aspects of the secular world.[86] He made the point that as much as the evangelical world tried to insulate itself from secular society, it did so selectively - it did not do that when it came to capitalism. As Styll said, "our agenda was to succeed and by succeed, I mean, you know, make money in the sort of purest sense, if you will. We weren't trying to be muckrakers and all that stuff. But we had an obligation to our shareholders, our investors, to return a profit if we could, which we rarely did. But we tried."[87] The legitimate need for money would also impact the content of the magazine, which changed with the culture in the 1990s.

As if in light of the changing world of the 1990s, in April 1993, the magazine re-wrote their statement of purpose. One change was to change the description of 'faith' from "the gospel" to a

81. Steve Rabey, "Sound and Vision," CCM, July 1993.
82. Steve Rabey, "Age to Age," *CCM*, July 1998.
83. Sara Diamond, *Not by Politics Alone: The Enduring Influence of the Christian Right* (New York: Guilford Press, 1998), 49.
84. Styll, interview.
85. John Daniel Lindenbaum, "The Industry, Geography, and Social Effects of Contemporary Christian Music," 2009, 46.
86. Lindenbaum, 107.
87. Styll, interview.

"deep, vibrant relationship with Jesus Christ." In the old statement, the music merely needed to be music which "expresses a Christian point of view" or be music from people who publicly claimed to be Christians. But in the new statement, the point of the music was to portray "the grace and truth of the gospel message or to apply biblical principles to all areas of life."[88] What this change did was transform a magazine which covered Christian music largely from the industry's point of view, to one whose primary purpose was to evangelize people through music. Yet Styll and the makers of the magazine held the tension of a statement like this. With a staff that was more progressive than the audience, they had to balance who the audience was because "if you alienate everybody, they go away, then you've lost your platform. That's the balancing act we dealt with every single month."[89] In 1998, on the 20th anniversary of the magazine, Styll said, "I would really like us to be a music magazine for Christians more than a Christian music magazine. Ultimately, we would have a better shot at having a redemptive influence in popular culture, rather than simply reinforcing the prejudices and stereotypes of a subculture. We're about music, about faith, and about the cultural environment in which it all exists."[90] Yet the magazine in the 1990s didn't reach Styll's desire.

Then, after two decades, Styll sold the magazine. Financial issues had caused him to bring on a partner at some point in the 1980s, which infused the company with money. In exchange for that, the partner, Christopher C. Dewey, took a controlling stake in the company.[91] In 1999 when Dewey wanted to sell, the only available and viable buyer was Salem Communications. Styll said, "when Salem took over, I didn't want to sell to them. But they absolutely had a corporate point of view. That is, conservative, conservative, conservative." At the time of the sale, CCM Communications was publishing five different magazines that targeted Christian music consumers.[92] Salem also bought two other Christian consumer companies at the same time, expanding their reach over the evangelical world, the CEO a strong financial supporter of conservative politics. After the sale Styll remained as executive editor, but in 2001 he resigned completely saying, "it's become increasingly clear that a leadership change is in the best interests of both Salem and *CCM*."[93] After he resigned, the magazine underwent another change. It became broader, focusing on Christian culture, covering movies and books, and the layout became more visually chaotic as the 2000s progressed. The print

88. Thom Granger, "Intro," *CCM*, April 1993.
89. Styll, interview.
90. Doug Trouten, "Cover to Cover," CCM, July 1998, 50.
91 Styll says he did not have enough business knowledge to have handled that deal better.
92. Anna Gorman, "Christian Radio Firm Branches Out," February 9, 1999, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1999-feb-09-me-6285-story.html.
93. Styll said he was essentially pushed out by Salem. Kathryn Darden, "Founder of CCM Magazine John Styll Resigns," Christian Activities, April 24, 2001, https://www.Christianactivities.com/founder-of-ccm-magazine-john-styll-resigns.

version of the magazine finally came to an end in 2008, three months shy of its 30th anniversary. The magazine's history from the 1970s to 2008 also paralleled the tie between evangelicals and the Republican Party, and their successes and failures over the years.

## THE GOP

At the same time that the music industry and the magazine were getting started, evangelicals were working on intentionally building closer ties with the Republican Party. As one sociologist said, "if the 1970s marked the political awakening for religious conservatives, the 1980s marked their coming of age."[94] The 1980s was when the Moral Majority helmed by Jerry Falwell was at its height, before ending in 1989. Their efforts served to start bringing evangelical voters to the GOP, but more work was needed. In the late 1980s, white evangelicals in the south were mostly still Democrats while white evangelicals outside the south tended to be Republican.[95] As Christian Right researcher Sara Diamond said, "for the Christian Right, the strategic lesson of the 1980s was to keep one figurative foot inside formal Republican Party circles and another planted firmly within evangelical churches."[96] The years between 1989 and 1992 would be significant in solidifying their power.

Political realignment did not just casually happen. In 1989, after George H.W. Bush was elected, the Republican Party was made up of Protestants from mainline and evangelical denominations, while the Democrats "remained the party of cultural minorities, with increased numbers of secular voters, black Protestants, and a smattering of liberals from other traditions."[97] The 1992 election was a significant one for political and religious realignment. Conservative evangelicals took over and drafted the 1992 Republican Party platform and went on to have significant grassroots success in local elections throughout the country that year.[98] Surveys taken in the spring of 1992 showed that evangelicals were more conservative on social issues, with mainliners and seculars much less so, and for a variety of reasons, evangelicals were Bush's strongest

94. Dale McConkey, "Whither Hunter's Culture War? Shifts in Evangelical Morality, 1988-1998," Sociology of Religion 62, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 149–74, 152.
95. Pew Research Center, "Religion and the Presidential Vote," December 6, 2004, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2004/12/06/religion-and-the-presidential-vote/.
96. Sara Diamond, *Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States*, Critical Perspectives (New York: Guilford Press, 1995), 290.
97. Lyman Kellstedt et al., "Religious Voting Blocs in the 1992 Election: The Year of the Evangelical?," *Sociology of Religion* 55, no. 3 (Autumn 1994): 307–26, 313.
98. Diamond, *Roads to Dominion*, 296.

supporters.[99] Indicative of the efforts by political operatives, in the 1992 election, evangelicals voted for Republican congressional candidates at rates higher than in 1988 and 1990, while mainliner's support for them declined. But surprisingly, exit polls taken after the 1992 election showed that evangelicals identified as Republican "*in even larger numbers than in the spring.*"[100] The ultimate result of the 1992 campaign was to "bind evangelicals to the Republican party, as they replaced Protestant mainliners as the most loyal to the GOP."[101] This seemed to also correspond with the losses of mainline congregants and a surging increase to evangelical churches between 1965 and 1989.[102] At the time, 1992 was seen as "the Year of the Evangelical," because of the way that grassroots efforts among evangelicals were effective and seemed as if they would continue and intensify in the future, which of course they did.[103]

This turn between 1988 and 1992 didn't just happen - it required those grassroots efforts, which were aided by two significant events. The first was the 1991 publication of the book *Culture Wars* by James Davison Hunter, which defined and gave language to the social issues being debated in American society. The other was the speech given by Pat Buchanan at the Republican National Convention in August of 1992, where he described a "cultural war," which was a war "for the soul of America."[104] Just as the magazine was redoing its statement of purpose, becoming more evangelically-minded in content and becoming more successful, so too were the culture wars becoming a successful recruitment tool. These two events were the undercurrent to the political work put forward by people like Ralph Reed and his Christian Coalition.

The Christian Coalition was a significant part of evangelical's fierce devotion to the Republican Party in the 1990s. Founded in 1989 by Pat Robertson as Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority was closing its doors, the Christian Coalition ran by Reed worked to build ties between evangelicals and the Republican Party. By 1993 the Christian Coalition had 500,000 members, and by 1995 they had 1.6 million active supporters and a $25 million annual budget. Before the 1994 elections, the Coalition handed out 33 million voter guides, mostly in churches. Because of Reed's work, "the Christian right exercised considerable control of Republican parties in 13 states and completely

99. Kellstedt et al., 316.
100. Kellstedt et al., 320.
101. Kellstedt et al., 308, 322. Iitalics in original; the author's shock at the change makes me wonder if the L.A. Riots were a significant motivating factor since they were mentioned by both Pat Buchanan and Dan Quayle in their speeches.
102. Richard N. Ostling, "The Generation That Forgot God," Time, April 5, 1993.
103. Kellstedt et al., 323.
104. Which he tied to the L.A. Riots

dominated 18 others."[105] In contrast to the 1992 presidential election, on November 8, 1994, Republicans won control of both houses of Congress for the first time in 40 years; Newt Gingrich became Speaker of the House, and presented his Contract for America. Within days of winning, he announced that a constitutional amendment allowing school prayer would be a priority for the new Congress.[106] Then, on May 15, 1995, Ralph Reed was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine, along with the words "The Right Hand of God." That month, standing next to Gingrich, Ralph Reed unveiled his Contract with the American Family, the central focus of it a "proposed constitutional amendment to protect 'religious expression.'"[107] This particular conservative political success was mirrored in the magazine very specifically and exemplified how the magazine paralleled the Republicans.

### CARMAN

One of the most popular Christian artists of the 1980s and '90s was Carman Licciardello. He was famously known for being a provocateur with his dramatic, musical-like productions and his albums were consistently at the top of the charts, even as people admitted his fanaticism. When Styll interviewed Carman for the first time in March 1988, he admitted he didn't like him and did not want to interview him. "I thought he was a judgmental, holier-than-thou type who manipulated audiences and looked ridiculous on album covers."[108] One of his songs was called "Our Turn Now" and it was about school prayer. For the video, Carman was joined by the immensely popular Christian hard rock band, Petra, whose appearance signaled popular support for the messages in that song, which include lyrics such as:

> *They wouldn't let children pray in school/Violent crime began to rise*
> *The grades went down and the kids got high/Free love, gay rights*
> *No absolutes, abortion on demand/Brought VD, AIDS, and no morality*[109]

This song revealed how everything deemed to be wrong in society, particularly the issues affecting

105. Jeffrey H. Birnbaum, . "The Gospel According to Ralph." Time, May 15, 1995.
106. John Zipperer, "School-Prayer Amendment Draws Mixed Support." Christianity Today, January 9, 1995.
107. Birnbaum.
108. Styll, John. *The Heart of the Matter: The CCM Interviews*. Nashville, TN: Star Song Communications, 1991, 23.
109. The scene during the VD/AIDS lyrics shows a Black girl and a white boy kissing, a nod to white fears of miscegenation.

hetero-patriarchal family values, were caused because of a 1962 Supreme Court decision that stopped mandating Christian prayer in public schools. The video showed Christians being successful when the principal joined the students in prayer around the flagpole, and then subsequently led a Bible study in a classroom.

Carman continually focused on the issue of school prayer in the magazine. As Andrew Hartman explained in his history of the culture wars, battles over school prayer were part of a greater struggle against public schools.[110] In 1994, Carman ran a 2-page ad in the magazine for an album, and it said, "Carman urges each of us to return to the Christian principles our country was founded upon," and it included a form to fill out which said "Let's put God in America again." By signing it and returning it to Carman Ministries, the reader was joining Carman in supporting a constitutional amendment to permit voluntary prayer in public schools. The second page of the ad revealed the importance of the issue when it said, "Because it's not just politics, it's your life."[111] Carman clearly connected songs about Jesus with nationalism, and the magazine eventually joined him.

Three months later, the magazine reviewed his concert, describing how everyone at the concert signed the petition they were given in support of the amendment. The magazine then included a parenthetical that said, "for information on how you can start Carman's petition in your community, call…" Three months after that, in August 1994, just a couple of months before the midterm elections, Carman ran another ad. This one was double-sided. On the backside was a form with space for 15 people to sign their names, again to support a petition to Congress asking for a constitutional amendment for school prayer. The front page of the ad was a letter from Carman explaining his reasoning for the amendment, listing statistics from a dubious Christian company that proved "the increase in national immorality."[112] He stated that his goal was to get 1 million signatures in support of the amendment.

What made this particular ad more significant than his earlier ones was that at the top right of the ad was a textbox that overlaid the letter, which said, "*CCM* has joined Carman Ministries in supporting the 'American Again' petition in our nation…Thank you for uniting with us to help put God in America Again." This campaign showed how in just under six and a half years, *CCM* went from thinking Carman was a holier-than-thou performer to supporting his efforts to change the

110. Hartman, ch 3.
111. *CCM*, April 1992.
112. The statistics are from David Barton and his company Wallbuilders, known for creating a historically inaccurate Christian version of American history

Constitution of the United States. Styll doesn't remember this particular situation but said "I wouldn't do that today. I think we probably did what seemed prudent at the time."[113] Carman was the artist that was the most overt about specifically connecting evangelical beliefs with political governance, but he was also highly successful at it. People wanted what he was selling, and what was prudent from a business standpoint was not alienating those consumers. The result, however, was, as Styll voluntarily said, "the whole idea of Christian nationalism. I didn't know that term. But we were probably acting like that a little bit. I'd have to chalk that up to a certain amount of immaturity. And a certain amount of we knew our market."

After the success of the "Republican Revolution" in 1994, the Democrats managed to retain the presidency in 1996, and that election reinforced the political desire to motivate evangelicals to get more involved in politics. The culmination of those efforts were seen in the election of George W. Bush in 2000.[114] But after that win, evangelicals began falling away from the Republicans. This was partly because there were few successes in national-level governmental policy on culture war issues.[115] This reality was acknowledged when in 1999, the same year that Styll sold the magazine, Paul Weyrich, who came up with the term "moral majority", declared that the evangelicals had lost the culture wars, when he said, "I no longer believe that there is a moral majority," and that "we probably have lost the culture war."[116] He still advocated focusing on winning those battles in their homes and churches, but didn't think politics would be the place to change the culture at large.

The parallels between the politics and the magazine continued when in 2001, Styll resigned, and in the aftermath of September 11th and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Bush and the Republican party began losing the support of white evangelicals. In 2004 when Bush won reelection, it may have been partly because of how hard evangelicals worked for the GOP, but the size of Americans who were evangelicals had not changed since 2000.[117] Overall, the percentage of Americans who were white evangelicals only went from 19% in 1987 to 23% in 2004. But the effects of the 1990s culture wars were visible in the amount of white evangelicals who identified as Republican. In 1987, 34% of them were Republican while 29% were Democrats. But by 2004, 48%

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113. Styll, interview.
114.Gustav Niebuhr, "THE 2000 CAMPAIGN: THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT; Evangelicals Found a Believer in Bush," The New York Times, February 21, 2000, sec. U.S.
115. McConkey, 153.
116. Terry Mattingly, Scripps Howard News Service, "With 1999 Epistle, Paul Weyrich Led Culture War," The Ledger.
117. "Evangelicals Say They Led Charge for GOP," NBC News, November 8, 2004, https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna6431260.

of white evangelicals were Republicans and only 23% were Democrats.[118] By 2004, it was clear that being a white evangelical meant one was most likely a Republican.

Yet after 2004, Bush's approval with white evangelicals significantly dropped. But still, "white evangelicals have become the bedrock of the GOP."[119] People began to question though how long that relationship would last. By 2007, political fracturing over various issues within evangelicalism meant that internal white evangelical solidarity was breaking apart, which made the Republicans question if they should keep pursing that close-knit connection. There were divisions in evangelicalism, over their alliance with the Republicans, in approaches to ministry and theology, and because of a generational disconnect, which caused evangelical leader Tony Perkins to say, "It is almost like another split coming within the evangelicals."[120] The magazine's parallel to this could be seen in the way the magazine changed after Styll's resignation, with the move to be a broader pop culture publication, and the increasing visual chaos in the graphic design and layouts. It was not a clean, cohesive music magazine any longer. This parallel culminated with *CCM* ending its print run the same year Obama won the presidency. In 2008, *CCM* became merely a website about the by then largely worship music industry, the contemporary Christian music industry itself having undergone so much change in the name of hope.

118. Pew Research Center, "Religion and the Presidential Vote,"
119. "Will White Evangelicals Desert the GOP? | Pew Research Center,"
https://www.pewresearch.org/2006/05/02/will-white-evangelicals-desert-the-gop/.
120. David Kirkpatrick, "The Evangelical Crackup," The New York Times, October 28, 2007.

# 2. My Place in this World: White Jesus and a White Public

*Oppression and liberation are the very substance of the entire historical context within which divine revelation unfolds.* – Elsa Tamez[121]

In 1994, after releasing seven albums, including a crossover song that made it to No. 6 on the Billboard top charts, and after winning several Dove Awards and even a Grammy, the singer Michael W. Smith said, "being a white male in the pop arena today is not necessarily the most popular thing going on - it's tough."[122] A couple of years later, Smith started his own label, Rockettown Records, to help younger artists get started. He said, "I would love to be able to help develop some of that talent."[123] The label would eventually have a cumulative roster of 20 different artists, 19 of them white. Color lines do not just appear - they are built and maintained, and what Smith did was to take the institutional power and success he had gained, and put his energy into reproducing it.

This chapter looks at the whiteness of the Christian music industry and how that shaped the magazine's content. Using magazine studies, aesthetic theory, and subcultural identity theory, this chapter shows how the magazine enabled readers to imagine themselves as part of a white Christian community. It also looks at the racial formation of listeners and uses Michael Warner's theory of publics to see how racial in-grouping created a public centered around whiteness. The collective identity work done through the magazine was supported by the larger evangelical world which came to value the idea of colorblindness. This also showed up in the magazine which revealed how evangelical in practice *CCM* was. Ultimately, what readers of the magazine learn is that the Jesus they believe in is white.

## Magazine as Community

*CCM* was part and parcel of the world of 1970s southern California. It emerged from this conservative white world in order to be a part of and help improve the new largely white Christian music industry. It emerged from a sector of evangelicalism that was creating the

121 Elsa Tamez, Bible of the Oppressed (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1982), 1.
122. "On the Beat," *CCM*, August 1994, 12.
123. April Hefner, "On the Beat," *CCM*, July 1996, 15.

institutional spaces for the movement to thrive, and this was one of those spaces. Because of this, the magazine and the people behind it began with a theological imagination of whiteness. The world of the contemporary Christian music industry, like much of the larger world of evangelicalism itself, was white, and so it was for the magazine. The whiteness of the space was important, because it was so unremarked upon. It was normalized and invisible, yet it acted powerfully in shaping the contents of the magazine. While theology was "one of the main ways evangelicals performed politics," contemporary Christian music was one tool by which the white theological became political.[124] Whiteness was not just about race - it was also about how one imagined God. Imagining a white God then, and living according to those perceived standards meant that when God wanted one to live in ways that had political consequences, one was also pursing white politics and calling it religious.[125]

First and foremost, *CCM* was a music magazine. While it would sometimes have articles on larger issues facing Christians, and while sometimes the content of their columns was on things other than music, by and large the publication was about the contemporary Christian music industry. It was not the only Christian music magazine, though. There were others such as *Singing News* focusing on southern gospel, and *Gospel Today* focusing on Black gospel music. *CCM* differed from secular music publications in that it was less opinionated than *Rolling Stone*, but contained more perspective than the straight reporting in *Billboard*. Even though it was started by people with no publishing experience, their research and continuing education into how to produce a professional magazine meant that *CCM* was a high quality publication capable of performing the cultural work that all magazines do.[126]

Believing that Christian music could bridge the gap between culture and faith, the makers of the magazine were intentional about how they discussed music and its influence on their audience.[127] This work the magazine did in inviting readers into interpreting faith and life was a function of what all magazines do, which is to "actively amplify and promote messages…and exhort their readers to act upon them."[128] Magazine writers and producers shape the information they include; the information is not objectively neutral. The power of a magazine is to help form readers' identity and

124. Jesse Curtis, *The Myth of Colorblind Christians: Evangelicals and White Supremacy in the Civil Rights Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2021), 5.
125. Curtis, 6.
126. Styll, interview.
127. *CCM*, February 1994.
128. Weiss and Sternadori, 52.

shape the way they live their lives.[129] Media, in all its various forms, "show us who we are and teach us about who we could be," so the content of *CCM* showed readers who they could be.[130]

## WHITE AESTHETIC IMAGINATION

The expertise of the magazine and its writers was important in teaching people who they could be. Frank Burch Brown discussed the way judgments and opinions about music are informed by experts in his book *Good Taste, Bad Taste, and Christian Taste*.[131] In it he wrote about liturgical music in a church setting, and described the way that pastoral musicians help shape the meaning of music for the listeners.[132] In a similar way, the people writing the magazine content collectively served the function of a music pastor, working from a position of authority on what Christian music was, what purpose it served, and the work it was supposed to be doing in shaping people's lives. As Brown said, "the degree of our aesthetic pleasure is enhanced or depressed by the judgments of others," and so the work these editors were doing was aesthetically and theologically important.[133] In the magazine this shaping of meaning occurred through letters from the editor, columns on what industry people were doing in the world, interviews with artists, album and concert reviews and columns on social issues that were of interest to artists and listeners. Brown analyzed the role of musical taste in shaping church communities, and pointed out that not only was there a correlation between public worship and belief, but also that the arts had a role in shaping and interpreting that belief as well as guiding a community's moral actions.[134] While a magazine is not a church, this magazine was working to similarly create a community of Christians.

One of the main ways this work was explicitly done, especially in the vein of guiding a community's moral actions, was through John Fischer's end column. For 23 years, Fischer had the last page of the magazine where he wrote a thoughtful opinion piece, usually about the role of Christians in the world. As Styll said to him, "You were my …bully pulpit in some ways. You spoke things that I couldn't say but needed to be said."[135] Fischer was not only a musician, continuing to

129. Weiss and Sternadori, 52-53.
130. Weiss and Sternadori, 55.
131. Frank Burch Brown, *Good Taste, Bad Taste, & Christian Taste: Aesthetics in Religious Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 180.
132. *Taste,* 185.
133. *Taste,* 179.
134. *Taste,* 183.
135. "The Catch Episode #14 with John Styll," BlogTalkRadio, March 5, 2014, https://www.blogtalkradio.com/thecatch/2014/03/05/the-catch-episode-14-with-john-styll.

release albums up through the 1990s, he also wrote several books, non-fiction and fiction, while he was with the magazine. All of this combined to give him the weight of authority that was based in part on his expertise in the music industry. Styll said, "he wasn't restricted to writing about music. But he made people think and that's what I was trying to do with his column."[136] In one of them, he wondered how relevant the Gospel message could be to the contemporary culture of the early 1990s. He talked directly about the role of a Christian in that work of relevance. "It is not enough to simply put the Gospel message into contemporary sounds and images. As good stewards of the secret things of God, we are responsible for interpreting the meaning of the message into contemporary life as well."[137] Fischer then critiqued the wider body of Christians, comparing them to Calvin, of *Calvin and Hobbes* to show how immature they were in how they approached faith. He was inviting the readers into a more thoughtful way of living, giving them the responsibility of nuance and authority.

The goal of the magazine was to improve everyone connected to the industry. They sought to make both the artists and listeners more intentional about what it was they were doing with this thing called Christian music. In that vein, they constantly talked about the essence of Christian music. Fischer wrote in one column about the pressure put on Christian songs to be explicitly Christian. He said the reason this happened was because "many Christians in this country do not have a sufficiently biblical world-view that incorporates all of truth from a distinctively Christian perspective."[138] He went on to say that it is "the believer's responsibility" to find truth anywhere it can be found in the world, that in moving through the world, Christians can sanctify it. He said because Christians did not do this, Christian artists were not allowed to create music from a broader world-view. Essentially, Fischer blamed listeners and the immaturity of their faith for the fact that Christian music was so explicitly Christian. And then a few months later, he wondered if the Gospel was even compatible with modern culture, describing modern Americans as passive, consumeristic, "incapable of making any lasting value judgments." In a tension that he continually pushed and pulled on, he advocated for Christians to know the secular culture in order to make the gospel known to it, but to do it without becoming "too enamored with our culture."[139] Later, he again analyzed what made Christian music Christian, and one of his points was that the music included the

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136 Styll, interview.
137. *CCM*, June 1992.
138. *CCM*, January 1992.
139. *CCM*, June 1992.

"fundamental doctrines of the gospel: sin, and its results in personal life and society at large."[140] But what a person considered sin in society at large was very subjective and political!

The audience of the magazine tended to be Baptists and Pentecostals as opposed to mainliners such as Presbyterians, Methodists or Catholics. They were people who were young teens and in their 20s. That's who the magazine was made for.[141] Readers interpreted those arguments according to what they as evangelicals believed about sin in personal life and society. So even as the magazine was challenging the readers to grow, it was doing so within specific communally defined parameters that limited their growth.

The work Fischer was doing with his exhortations towards Christians about their responsibility towards the secular culture was what Brown described in his book *Religious Aesthetics*, when he wrote that aesthetics was related to theology through its concern for truth and meaning, and its choice of subject matter and method.[142] Brown went on to say that the aesthetic realm and theological concepts exist "in mutually transformative, dialogical relationship."[143] Not only was the magazine a space for an interpretive community within the readership, it was also a space of authoritative theological formation between the magazine and its audience.

Fischer's concern with the way secular culture was shaping and forming American Christians came from understanding the aesthetic power of the arts. He understood that people could be shaped by what they watched and listened to - by what they were attracted to. He argued that the message of Jesus must be presented not just in words, "but in meanings and in ways which arrest attention."[144] What Fischer was arguing for was the creation of a particular theological cultural aesthetic. He wanted American Christians to be concerned about truth and to be aware of the subject matters they were concentrating on, and he was worried about the methods by which people were being formed. By doing this, he was helping to form a particular public with a certain theological aesthetic. Fischer's columns served as an important place where readers were invited to consider what he was saying and think of themselves the way he thought of them.

*CCM* served as a place where people could locate themselves within a social group. But despite Fischer's work, the magazine wasn't dictating what this group looked like from on high. Media studies scholar Matt Hills described how magazines act as "community-building paratexts."

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140. John Fischer, "Field of Themes," *CCM*, April 1995, 86.
141 Styll, interview.
142. Frank B. Brown, *Religious Aesthetics: A Theological Study of Making and Meaning* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993), 39.
143. *Aesthetics*, 42.
144. *CCM*, June 1992.

He looked at the role of magazines in developing an "interpretive community," which is a community formed through the shared understanding of what a text means. Hills used the work of literary theorist Stanley Fish to argue that the fan aspect of magazines like *CCM* also worked to influence the content and understanding of the texts. In order to do this, the fans and readers needed to have common assumptions so that as they engaged in a back and forth with the magazine, they arrived at a "communally endorsed" right way of interpreting the content.[145] Thus, the greater evangelical world the readers were part of informed their understanding of what the content meant, limiting Fischer's efforts.

### SUBCULTURAL IDENTITY THEORY

This aesthetic imaginative work and participatory aspect by the readers is an example of sociologist Christian Smith's theory of how people in a religious subculture create their own communal identity. In *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving*, Smith used subcultural identity theory to examine why evangelicals were such a strong and cohesive demographic in the 1980s and 1990s. In his book, he argued that it was living in a pluralistic society that gave them their vitality; they were strong because they had others to fight. One of his theoretical principles was the idea that the human urge for meaning and belonging is met by locating ourselves within a social group that has a distinctive, morally orienting collective identity.[146] Furthermore, these collective identities were maintained by "drawing symbolic boundaries that create distinction between themselves and relevant outgroups."[147] And additionally, both individuals and collectives defined their values and identities in relation to other groups; people outside the group served as examples of what makes being inside the group distinctive.[148] The Christian audience the magazine was addressing was not some large, generic, broad Christian audience. Rather, it was a particular audience in search of an identity, and finding it within the boundaries of white evangelicalism.

The work of the audience was important, because creating a distinctive social group was a communal task. When Styll started the magazine, it was initially designed to be a communications mechanism for the brand new industry. But as music fans also began reading it, their feedback shaped the direction of it, turning it from a trade magazine into a type of fan magazine. While the

145. Hills, Matt. "Magazines and Interpretive Communities." *The Handbook of Magazine Studies*, 2020, 293–306, 296.
146. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 90.
147. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 91.
148. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 104.

magazine was always trying to make the industry better, it was also responsive to fan feedback. In the 1980s, it had covered cultural items such as nuclear war, Star Wars, world hunger, and John DeLorean, but reader response caused them to change back towards music only. The reader response also shaped the type of music that was covered. The magazine stopped covering the metal music charts in January 1994 because "we feel that publishing the metal chart no longer meets the needs of the majority of our subscribers."[149] By the early 1990s, the magazine had become as a space for people to gather together "who love the Lord and enjoy contemporary music," and the debate over what that meant would repeatedly occur in the pages.[150]

Although reader response influenced the magazine, it was not necessarily the guiding force. There was tension in the creation of a collective identity through the magazine. There was a tension between the readers and the editors, as well as tension within the content itself, as they continually discussed the slippage between the sacred and the secular. In an April 1992 article titled "Enlarging the Vision of Contemporary Christian Music," Styll wrote about Christian artists getting airplay on secular radio, and what that said about the nature of Christian music.[151] He said, "rather than ask whether something is secular or Christian, we should ask whether it contains the truth; whether it glorifies God." He used this to talk about the sacred/secular divide that consistently came up in discussing Christian music, asking "can so-called 'secular' things glorify God?" Styll said that the real dividing line was not sacred or secular, but sin. In the article he said that it was time to re-define contemporary Christian music. This article was important because in the past, the music had been defined as songs with lyrics that were explicitly Christian. But now, the music should be the "soundtrack to everyday life," because Christianity had things to say about every aspect of life. He said this was also accurate because contemporary Christian music tended to focus on life in the here and now, while other forms of Christian music such as southern gospel and Black gospel dealt with the afterlife. In an industry that was primarily defined by the lyrical content of its songs, Styll was pushing for an expanded vision of what Christian music was.

The distinction between sacred and secular was not the only division discussed in the magazine. The magazine and the industry as a whole continually delineated between black gospel and CCM, even though much of what they marketed as gospel or urban was Black pop music. This meant that they were implicitly saying that real Christian music was white. Even now, Styll defines it

149. "Feedback," *CCM*, March 1994, 6.
150. *CCM*, June 1992.
151. John Styll, "Enlarging the Vision," *CCM*, April 1992, 49.

that way, saying, "the reason it's that way is people like it that way. White people like it that way, and Black people like it that way. They're culturally comfortable in that setting. It's the music they grew up with. It's music they like, whether you're white or Black…they're just different worlds. And we tried to cross those together as much as we could….but the heart wants what the heart wants and people like what they like. I don't think that's necessarily a big racial thing. It's just a cultural and comfort thing."[152] He is not wrong that white Christian listeners did not listen to Black Christian music. But why didn't they? Why did white Christian music listeners only prefer white Christian music? Whether it was white people in jazz clubs in Harlem, white teens listening to Jimi Hendrix, or in the 1990s at a TLC concert, white secular music listeners have always been willing to listen to and spend money on Black artists. Why weren't white Christians?

Despite seeing them as two separate entities, Styll tried to expand people's horizons by covering a wide variety of Black artists. While mostly only well-known groups such as the Winans graced the covers, every month Black artists were covered in the "On the Beat" round-up of happenings in the music world, they were given interviews, and ads frequently ran featuring Black artists and labels. Throughout the years of the magazine, there was never a shortage of Black artists for people to learn about. As Styll described it, "because it was a super white industry, it didn't mean that we had to be…We did not mirror the industry completely in that regard. We covered stuff that we thought should be covered. And it's always been sad to me. It was always sad to us that it was so freaking white and that those worlds didn't really mean very much. We always erred, I think on the side of finding good music and important artists and talking about them...We had a lot of white artists that black people should pay attention to, and there's a lot of black artists out there that white people should pay attention to."[153] Styll's coverage showed how intentionally white the Christian music industry was choosing to be. It was not a lack of Black artists that made the industry what it was.

But the way people understand the presented text is not a given; the interpretive community for a text comes from the ways they work together to decide the meaning of it.[154] Therefore the reader response is important for giving meaning to that which has been presented. Styll said, "I imagine most of our white audience didn't read the articles about black artists. And we didn't have as many black readers as we did white readers, so I don't know if that was a waste of time, but I'm

152. Styll, interview.
153. Styll, interview.
154. Hills, Matt. "Magazines and Interpretive Communities: Approaching the Commercial Media Fan Magazine." In *The Handbook of Magazine Studies*, edited by Miglena Sternadori and Tim Holmes, 1st ed., 293–306. Wiley, 2020., 294.

convinced that it was the right thing to do." The way readers interpreted the magazine was within a world that valued whiteness. Even if they did read the articles on Black artists, they were not as a community asking radio stations to play Black Christian music, and they did not go out and purchase the albums. However, their response to Black music was also formed by the way the magazine talked about Black music. If a large part of the formative work the magazine and the industry was doing was helping people become stronger Christians, then the siloing of Black music into the Gospel or Urban genres, as something separate from Contemporary Christian Music was teaching white people that they didn't need to think about Black people in order to live a faithful Christian life.

The separation of genres into racial categories was one of the ways that whiteness was normalized and made invisible in the magazine. Occasionally though, whiteness was talked about more explicitly. In April 1989, there was a letter to the editor asking why more Black artists weren't getting covered in the magazine, and why, when they were, were relegated to "Black gospel." Styll responded by saying, "the simple fact is that black gospel - from a cultural and marketing perspective - is a separate entity from the contemporary Christian market." Later, in 1991, Styll attempted to launch *American Gospel* magazine about Black Christian music. As he described it, it was a magazine "designed to reach the African American community." In his editorial about it he described the backlash he received to the idea, calling the reaction from the gospel community as being "racially motivated attacks" towards him. But as he also admitted, "I had never really given much thought to the issues which confront minorities - including African Americans…Although I never considered myself a racist, I now see that my life revolved around a fairly 'white' world…And I'll admit that I still have much to learn."[155] So even though Styll was trying to make readers think and expand the horizon of what Christian music could be, his efforts were still limited by his social location.

Despite this segregation in the industry, the magazine gave space for Black artists to speak honestly about their difficulties within it. Rapper Mike-E talked about his frustrations when radio stations refused to play his music, and said that Christian media had "a bigotry" toward the perceived lifestyles of rappers, but, he said, not towards their Blackness.[156] A 1998 article about a new organization, the E.R.A.C.E. Foundation, which was partially started with the band dc Talk, described how while the acronym stood for Eliminating Racism and Creating Equality, the focus of the organization was racial reconciliation. White CCM star and dc Talk member Toby McKeehan

155. *CCM*, September 1991, 4.
156. *CCM*, January 1993, 24.

said that "this industry doesn't reach African-Americans," but that "racism is not a color problem; it's a human condition."[157] The article, though, does not talk about holding anyone accountable or making any structural changes in order to include more Black people. This reflected the research done by Michael Emerson and Christian Smith in their book, *Divided by Faith*. They argued that it was the evangelical focus on individualism that prevented evangelicals from viewing racism as a systemic, structural problem.[158] McKeehan described his label as trying to promote the Black female band Out of Eden, but that it was "an uphill battle." CeCe Winans also pointed out that in the past, the labels didn't have a plan for her, saying "it was very hard for us to accomplish the things we accomplished."[159] And the magazine said that even Kirk Franklin was only accepted in the Christian music industry after he was successful in the secular world.[160] This segregation in the industry as portrayed in the magazine told readers that it existed, but also that there was nothing concrete anyone could do about it.

### STRUCTURAL WHITENESS

But systemic inequities are created by people, and throughout the years the magazine also revealed how structural reinforcement of whiteness in the industry worked. There were occasional articles with advice about getting into the industry. Framed as advice to wanna-be artists, it also showed how hard it was to break into the industry if one was different. One example comes from 1989, with label executive Peter York's advice to look at who record companies signed to see if the label had been successful with the type of artist that the signee was. The goal was to see if they felt like they could fit in at the label and be successful. But when the companies were signing almost entirely all white artists, how could a Black artist see themselves represented? In another example, an answer to a letter to the editor in March 1994 explained how radio airplay worked to determine what category a song would be listed as in determining the monthly charts of top songs on the radio. The magazine explained how radio promoters for each label called radio stations to promote their artists and songs. It said, "the songs are distributed to different types of radio stations based on the style of music," and went on to describe the different types of music such as pop, rock, inspirational. While

157. *CCM*, February 1998, 10.
158. Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001).
159. *CCM*, December 1999, 39.
160. *CCM*, February 1998, 10. Kirk Franklin throughout his career has called out the industry for its racism and has pleaded to be included in CCM.

race was never discussed in the answer, it still showed how, because Black music wasn't considered Christian pop, rock, or top 40 hits, it would never get played on those radio stations, serving to reinforce a segregated musical world.[161] In this way the boundaries between genres also helped to maintain boundaries between races.

Many people have claimed that secular corporations began buying out the Christian labels solely for financial gain because the industry had become profitable. While undoubtedly this was true, people have not examined why it is that those secular labels were only interested in white Christians.[162] It is interesting because those secular companies also produced Black music for diverse secular audiences. Why wouldn't they continue to do that as they got into the Christian market? Andrew Mall, in his book *God Rock, Inc.*, studied the business aspect of the Christian music industry. He said, "the boundaries of niche markets are discursively defined by negotiation between and among all participants - artists, cultural intermediaries, and consumers - in a perpetual, iterative, and self-replicating process."[163] Of course the labels had entered a subculture where boundary marking and the making of collective identity was already underway. They were not the only ones responsible for the white boundaries of the CCM industry - the boundaries were constantly negotiated by everyone involved. But the magazine and the white artists never questioned why it was that a white audience was targeted when there was also always money to be made in Black markets. If the addition of secular companies and their money was such a significant shakeup of the industry, then why didn't the racial boundaries also get disturbed? Chalking the whiteness of the industry up to capitalism or greed from the labels ignored the way that there was a vested interest in targeting conservative white Christians.

If the Christian music industry was truly about the art of music, it was giving up a lot in the pursuit of whiteness. Mall wrote about the consequences of those decisions, saying that the music on Christian radio tended "towards a centrism; banal and unthreatening to large listening publics.[164]" Styll described it as "homogenous, vanilla output."[165] But if the industry was about becoming a cultural arm of the Republican Party, then its decisions made logical financial sense. The only way the music could be unthreatening to a large listening public of white evangelicals was if it didn't

161. *CCM*, March 1994, 9.
162. Mall himself makes this point. "Christian music's theological and/or aesthetic potentials became peripheral to its commercial success," 85.
163. Andrew Mall, *God Rock, Inc.: The Business of Niche Music*, First edition (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2020), 96.
164. Mall, *God Rock, Inc.*, 82.
165. Mall, *God Rock, Inc.*, 83.

threaten their sense of self. And because whiteness was so fundamental to evangelicalism itself, to serve the status quo, the music had to center white people.[166] The communal identity work that the magazine was facilitating was significant because being connected through relational networks like that "can help to hold the fabric of religious commitment and affiliation tight."[167] But what bound this community together was not Jesus, but whiteness.

This was the heart of the issue. The core of the industry was white and therefore the target was the core, and as Styll said, the market can't serve the core and the margin.[168] But normalizing whiteness in Christian music by calling white music 'Christian' and Black music 'other' was a way of socially constructing what was considered authentic Christian music, and thus the core.[169] The social construction was part of this interpretive community supported by the magazine and it came from the labels, the radio stations, the magazine, and the fans. When the record labels "identified their ideal listeners as white, middle-class women churchgoers with families," it decided who they wanted their core to be.[170] In addition to the advice about getting signed at labels, the labels also only signed people who fit radio's parameters.[171] If Christian radio wouldn't play you, artists were told to purse a deal elsewhere. A lot of the blame for this was laid at the feet of radio programmers and labels. As a director of CCM radio explicitly said in one piece about the business of getting music on the radio, getting an artist on the air was about "the systems and structures that are in place."[172] So people recognized the structural, systemic problems within the industry that kept the music lyrically safe and even demographically white, but they didn't see the structural, systemic preference for whiteness that shaped the industry itself. But if Christian music helped to "shape, mold and define who we are," then it was consequential that whiteness was so central to the core.[173]

The whiteness of the Christian music industry did racially shape and mold its listeners. When white listeners heard white artists singing songs about a white faith it, not surprisingly, shaped their attitudes towards Black music and Black people.[174] Communication researchers Omotayo O. Banjo

166. Anthea D. Butler, *White Evangelical Racism: The Politics of Morality in America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021).
167. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 219.
168. Mall, *God Rock, Inc.,* 146.
169. Mall, *God Rock, Inc.*, 36.
170. Mall, *God Rock, Inc.*, 81. And who, incidentally are also the most toxic and fragile when it comes to issues of race.
171. Mall, *God Rock, Inc.* P 82.
172. *CCM*, September 1997, 14.
173. *CCM*, April 1997, 4..
174. Omotayo O. Banjo and Kesha Morant Williams, "Behind the Music: Exploring Audiences' Attitudes toward Gospel and Contemporary Christian Music," F Journal of Communication & Religion 37, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 117–38, 118.

and Kesha Morant Williams analyzed Black and white Christian music listeners and their attitudes towards CCM and Black gospel music. They found that the music helped listeners to locate themselves within a social group, the racial segregation of the industry helping to delineate an in-group from an out-group. When studying both groups, Banjo and Williams found that although questions about the two genres did not mention race, the participants "quickly attributed race to each of the genres when asked about the out-group members."[175] Despite CCM and Black Gospel music both having a Christian message, "the sociocultural influences of each genre are evident in the songs."[176] As a result, white people preferred white CCM and Black people Black gospel because of the positive connotations associated with in-grouping.

For white listeners, because they come from a place of social privilege and power, this became significant. Banjo and Williams described how the white listeners of CCM "expressed discomfort and superficial understanding of race relations," which showed the effects of CCM being "more closely associated with white Protestant denominations." Because of this close association, these teens understood it to be the cultural norm of what Christian music was.[177] The white participants also exoticized Black gospel music, verbalized stereotypes of a Black church experience, and believed gospel music was focused on the past - that it reflected "the mindset of enslaved Africans."[178] White listeners of CCM therefore were not only affirmed in their whiteness, but developed a positive connotation for other white participants in the industry, at the same time they developed negative opinions of Black music and its listeners simply through the act of listening to the music. This was made more evident because the white listeners had little experience with gospel music, and so their responses reflected their interpretation of Black people in general.[179]

The results of Banjo and Williams' research affirms Smith's theory on subcultural identity formation. Smith said that the work of maintaining in and out groups was a continuous process, and that people self-categorize through social comparison. For white people who listened to white music that was presented as default Christian, and saw Black Christian music as Gospel or Urban, they were also categorizing themselves as white and normative and Black as other.[180] If white teenagers wanted to listen to Christian music, white CCM was not their only option. Black CCM artists such as

175. Banjo and Williams, "Behind the Music," 128.
176. Omotayo O. Banjo and Kesha Morant Williams, "A House Divided? Christian Music in Black and White," Journal of Media and Religion 10, no. 3 (2011): pp. 115-137, 129.
177. Banjo and Williams, "Behind the Music," 128.
178. Banjo and Williams, "Behind the Music," 129-130.
179. Banjo and Williams , "Behind the Music," 130.
180. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 91, 92, 94.

Out of Eden, Nicole C. Mullen, and CeCe Winans existed (even though they did not get played on CCM radio).[181] The work of social categorization worked both ways though. Outgroups not only affirmed the boundaries of an in-group, they could also serve as a negative reference group.[182] So for white listeners, not only were Black Christians 'other,' they also could be seen as a negative group. This perception was reinforced when political parties became so racially connected. If to be a Christian was to be a Republican, and most Black people were Democrats, then Black people could be seen as not real Christians, and their views of Jesus, liberation, and justice could be ignored. For white listeners, the whiteness of contemporary Christian music kept them in a continuous loop of collective identity affirmation of their whiteness.

### CREATION OF A PUBLIC

This in-group collective identity work also served to create a public. Michael Warner, in his book *Publics and Counterpublics*, laid out a theory of publics. In it he described a public as a space of discourse organized by discourse that gave a sense of belonging.[183] This means that all of the textual work going on in the magazine, all of the 'talking' that everyone was collectively doing, was actively serving to create a community of people in that process of communicating. Through the act of participating in a discourse together strangers came to recognize each other as being in a relationship together.[184] They imagined themselves as being connected by something. Listening to contemporary Christian music and reading the magazine helped white evangelical strangers across the country see themselves as united in some way - as CCM listeners with similar church environments and beliefs. But they were also imagining themselves as being connected by whiteness and the political goals of whiteness.

Those white readers and listeners were not imagining themselves as followers of a Jesus who James Cone called the "Black Christ."[185] Warner said a public was "constitutive of a social imaginary," and having a social imaginary of whiteness shaped the boundaries of that public.[186] As

181. Milmon F. Harrison, "'ERACE-Ing' the Color Line: Racial Reconciliation in the Christian Music Industry," Journal of Media and Religion 4, no. 1 (2005): pp. 27-44, 36
182. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 104.
183. Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, (New York, NY: Zone Books, 2010), 68, 70.
184. Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics,* 75.
185. James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 40th anniversary ed (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 2010), 127.
186. Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 12.

Warner described, *a* public is different from *the* public.[187] There are multiple publics, and when someone addressed one, it was to engage in struggles "over the conditions that bring them together as a public."[188] When one joined the *CCM* public, in order to go from an unknown stranger to a participant, they had to locate themselves as a social entity, according to certain communally defined criteria.[189] The criteria for joining the *CCM* public was someone who preferred whiteness. While it seemed as if Christian music is what brought the magazine and its readers together, the struggle they were engaged in, the conditions they discussed and wrestled with were not simply about living a musically infused Christian life. The struggle over what it meant to be a Christian engaging with the culture was ultimately about politics and whiteness.

The white social imaginary of the magazine audience was a theological and political exercise. As Brown wrote, art cannot be divorced from the possibility of publics; it is something fundamentally communal, and theology is an exercise of imaginations.[190] This connection of art, communal publics, and theological imagination could be seen in a 1995 article entitled "Making Waves in a '90s Culture." Written by pastor-to-CCM-artists Scotty Smith, it was about the idea that Christians are called to be the "salt of the earth." Smith took a theological concept and imagined what it meant for this audience of music listeners, showing them what it would look like for them to impact secular culture. The point of this article was to tell people that they should be "salty" and interact with the world, not segregate themselves away from it. This article was working to cultivate a group of people into living a certain way, for a certain reason. It then gave a list, the "top 10 characteristics of salty Christians," which included reading the Bible, having a "lifestyle" that is "determined by a Biblical worldview," evangelizing, finding joy in "penetrating their world for Christ and loving God in the battlefields and marketplaces of life," loving others, being humble, and serving Christ.[191] While these characteristics appeared to be merely about faith, the undercurrent of "Biblical worldview" shaped the results. In what is maybe Warner's most important point about publics, he said that "the direction of our glance can constitute our social world."[192] This article directed a public's gaze towards one way and one way only of embodying Christian faith, and it was a faith that people understood was to be lived in particular ways.

Because of the way discourse was foundational to creating a public, Smith's article was an

187. Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 65.
188. Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 12.
189 Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 106.
190. Brown, *Aesthetics*, 87.
191. Scotty Smith, "Making Waves in a '90s Culture," *CCM*, January 1995.
192. Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 87, 89.

example of how the magazine had a sense of responsibility over the spiritual formation of their readers. He was very aware that he was addressing a particular public. In an earlier article he said, "I am writing this article for a Christian magazine that has a stated philosophy of ministry and a demographic context. It is published by Christians, for Christians about Christians who are called to the creative process of impacting our contemporary culture through Christian music with the grace and truth of Jesus Christ. What is the responsibility of a magazine like *CCM* to its readership, to its focus (contemporary music made by Christians), to Biblical guidelines, and to those about whom it writes/reports or chooses not to?"[193] Smith said 'Christians' in the broad sense, but the public to whom he was writing had a very specific understanding of what the grace and truth of Jesus meant, and what Biblical guidelines meant.

Yet as the magazine thought deeply about the spiritual formation of their readers and the role that music played in it, racial formation was never part of that analysis. When the magazine included discussions about race, it only talked about why there weren't many Black artists, about the need for reconciliation, and their desire for a colorblind society. While sometimes they referred to people as being prejudiced, they also often denied that blatant racism was part of the equation. They never questioned whites on their preference for whiteness or the way that it shaped their understanding of the Bible or their political preferences. This failure to address whiteness was because the magazine's staff was breathing the same cultural air as their public, and it was as normative to them as their readers.

The magazine also misunderstood or over-estimated their public and its capabilities. As Warner described it, a common mistake when addressing a public through a written text is taking a public for a real person, one who is smart and thoughtful. But a public has a different personality from the individual people within it. A general public is curious but an individual person usually is not. This creates a tension because when communicating with a public in order to draw that person into the group, the writer must personally reach the incurious individual, while at the same time impersonally addressing the larger, thoughtful collective.[194] So when the magazine invited readers to pay attention to Black artists, or when it called for more nuanced ways of living a faith-filled life, it was speaking to a thoughtful public that they thought would respond. But a public does not have agency. A public cannot have a conversation or make a decision - only individuals can. And individually, white evangelicals were uninterested in examining or changing their white lives.

193. Scotty Smith, "A Time for Everything," April 1993, 46.
194. Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics,* 87.

One of the ways the magazine tried to talk to their public and tried to reason with them was over the issue of fame. In his letter from the editor in February 1994, Styll essentially scolded his teenage readers. They had been writing letters to the magazine, interested in the personal lives of the artists, jokingly claiming various people as their own. He said, "we've enjoyed your letters, but enough is enough." Then he worked out the nuances of the issue – that the audience has a right to know more about Christian artists so they can judge if they "walk their talk." He then warns people against idolatry but acknowledges the double standards of putting people on the cover of the magazine.[195] Yet nothing really changed. A couple of years later, Styll and the Gospel Music Association held a panel where they talked about the problem of Christian celebrities, as well as an issue with several articles about celebrity where they included more examples of fan feedback that was focused on the appearances of the artists.[196] Individually, the readers seemed uninterested in becoming more intentional, thoughtful people. Styll said that most of the people involved in the industry were uninterested in that. "I was always trying to get them [artists] to be more intentional and strategic and specific about what they were doing. I think a lot of the audience wasn't intentional and a lot of the artists weren't intentional and people in the industry weren't intentional." If readers were unwilling to be thoughtful about something as unimportant as celebrity, why would they be thoughtful when it came to more serious issues?

In talking about the readers of the magazine, Styll said their lack of interest in thinking thoughtfully affected how they thought about what to include in the magazine. "We had to be several steps ahead of the audience, in terms of what was coming down the pike and how we were going to cover it and how we were going to look at it…We had to outsmart them a little bit. I think we thought things through more deeply than most of our audience did…It's not even fair to say dumb it down, but we had to make it palatable for them." This behavior by the readers was partially because publics act within their own time. The discussions the magazine was having with its public were set within a particular time and place. As Warner (who grew up Pentecostal) said with some specificity, "addressing indefinite strangers…has a peculiar meaning when you know in advance that most people will be unwilling…to go to a black church," or in this case, listen to Black music.[197] The time and place the magazine and its public were set in was not just the Christian musical

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[195] *CCM*, February 1994, 5.
[196] *CCM*, July 1996, 22. *CCM*, May 1996, 99.
197. Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics,* 120. Pentecostal background described in "Tongues Untied: Memoirs of a Pentecostal Boyhood," *Curiouser*, 2004, 215–24.

environment of the 1990s. They all were a part of the larger evangelical universe of the time. Despite Styll's understanding of the magazine as being larger than evangelicalism, it was also firmly a part of that world.

## COLORBLIND MEGACHURCHES

The identity work that the magazine was cultivating was coinciding with the same occurrence in the Church Growth Movement. Part of the reason evangelicalism exploded so forcefully in the 1980s and '90s is because the notion of the megachurch met the Church Growth Movement. The movement, with its roots in 1950s missionary efforts, said that socially homogeneous churches grew the fastest, which helped to establish evangelicalism as "white, middle class, and suburban."[198] This, despite people such as Black evangelical John Perkins who pointed out how convenient it was for white evangelicals to discover that idea right after the Civil Rights Movement.[199] So, at the same time that the Christian music industry was growing, white churches were as well. And it was in these churches that "white middle class suburbanites" - strangers according to Warner - became a distinct group with a "strong sense of ethnic identity and loyalty."[200] The creation of the Church Growth Movement and the spread of evangelicalism brought together diverse groups of conservative Protestants, and by claiming the label 'evangelical' it affirmed "a set of cultural and political associations and forms of belonging in various 'imagined' communities that they find desirable to affirm."[201] And whereas the music industry was targeting a white woman with a family, the mega churches were targeting upper middle class white men.[202] So together, the white nuclear American family was targeted by the evangelical world to become a certain type of Christian. As Angie Maxwell and Todd Shields describe in their book, *The Long Southern Strategy*, churches "went along on the political ride willingly," through the choice to mix religion and politics with various Christian Right organizations and mass media organizations. This gave the vast evangelical community "some semblance of shared culture."[203] While this had political implications, the racial consequence was that

198. Jesse Curtis, *The Myth of Colorblind Christians: Evangelicals and White Supremacy in the Civil Rights Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2021), 78.
199. Curtis, *The Myth of Colorblind Christians*, 78.
200. Curtis, *The Myth of Colorblind Christians*, 78.
201. Curtis, *The Myth of Colorblind Christians*, 8.
Maxwell, Angie, and Todd G. Shields. *The Long Southern Strategy: How Chasing White Voters in the South Changed American Politics*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019, 220.
202. Curtis, *The Myth of Colorblind Christians*, 162.
[203] Maxwell and Shields, 289.

a white preference for how to talk about racial issues was established and it was the ideology of colorblindness.

The development of colorblind ideology went hand in hand with the creation of modern evangelicalism. Jesse Curtis, in his book *The Myth of Colorblind Christians*, described how colorblind theology was created, and how white evangelicals "used it to protect and shape new investments in whiteness as they attempted to grow the evangelical movement," all without challenging their power dynamics.[204] Curtis looked specifically at the Southern Baptist Convention and the Church Growth Movement to build his argument, looking at the evangelical response to the civil rights movement, and the way that Black evangelicals first used colorblind theology as a way to fight for their inclusion in a segregated church. But with integration happening in American society, evangelicals looked for ways to maintain segregated churches. As white flight to the suburbs increased, new white churches were built using the church growth movement's idea of homogeneous churches. He concluded the book by looking at how the racial reconciliation movement took place, and how Black evangelicals called for racial justice while white evangelicals concentrated on reconciliation. Ultimately Curtis showed how evangelicals also helped create the idea of a national colorblind mentality in politics.[205] The significance of this history revealed why it was so difficult to talk about race in a way that favored the Black perspective when he said, "thinking about whiteness was theologically disturbing for many evangelicals, for it raised the possibility that their faith was not unmediated divine truth but was instead a culturally and racially conditioned religiosity."[206] The white evangelical faith was a constructed one, built on social and cultural norms that white people preferred.

The development of colorblind theology was done by whites, for whites, and as J. Russell Hawkins explains in *The Bible Told Them So*, it emerged explicitly from segregation. Hawkins looked at Southern Baptists and Methodists in South Carolina to see how two different church structures and denominations reacted to the civil rights movement and its aftermath. Hawkins too showed how both denominations used their faith as a reason to fight integration, and how that morphed into support for colorblindness and an increased focus on the family. This more polite form of segregation allowed them to maintain respectable social standing. He too showed how these ideas spread rapidity in the evangelical subculture in the 1970s, with lasting results.[207] One of Hawkins'

204. Curtis, *The Myth of Colorblind Christians*, 2.
205. Curtis, *The Myth of Colorblind Christians*, introduction.
206. Curtis, *The Myth of Colorblind Christians*, 73.
207. J. Russell Hawkins, *The Bible Told Them so: How Southern Evangelicals Fought to Preserve White Supremacy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), introduction.

pieces of evidence was a letter written by an "ardent segregationist" on behalf of a Methodist organization working to stop church integration. The letter argued that the church should stop talking about race in order to solve the problem of race, and in making that argument, the author used the phrases "natural affinities," "mutual appreciation of merits," and "voluntarily association of individuals," all of which were taken from the Plessy v. Ferguson decision. This showed how "the new language of colorblindness had its roots in the desire for segregation."[208] This is partially how and why whiteness and evangelicalism became so intimately connected. One consequence of the magazine being formed in a white environment is that when whiteness is the air one breathes, its invisibility can make it seem absent.

Because colorblindness was such an evangelical ideology, its appearance in the magazine was another example of how evangelical in practice *CCM* was. Often appearing in the magazine when it talked about race, two examples show how it worked to embed sacred whiteness. In Fischer's July 1993 column titled, "Police the Heart," he reflected on the 15th anniversary of the magazine. As he reflected on the social and cultural changes between 1978 and 1993, he saw the current time as being in a state of cultural upheaval, and amidst that, "the only constant has got to be a consistent biblical world view and a heart knowledge of God." The example he gave of the tension pulling society apart was that the American melting pot "is looking more and more like a melting pot that refuses to melt." Instead, all of these "ethnic groups" were desperately holding onto their own identities. While he acknowledged this had led to diversity in music styles which he saw as a good thing, it also showed his colorblind attitude.[209] A couple of years later, the letter from the editor introduced an issue that included an article on racism. It said their hope was that the article "invites more honest interaction between races so that we can all learn to love freely and to conform ever closer to the image of a holy and colorblind Father."[210] They did not describe it as such, but this was the work of theological imagination. The whiteness of this concept was made even more clear when compared to someone like James Cone who said, "there is no place in black theology for a colorless God in a society where human beings suffer precisely because of their color…*We must become black with God!*"[211] This colorblind attitude led to a desire for racial reconciliation, not racial justice. White evangelicals were not fighting against racial hierarchies or trying to undo the power structures that kept white people in control of evangelical culture. Their desire for colorblindness was a way to

208. Hawkins, *The Bible Told Them So*, 101.
209. John Fischer, "Police the Heart," *CCM*, July 1993,78.
210. *CCM,* March 1996.
211. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation,* 67, 69.

avoid facing the consequences of their whiteness.

Ultimately, what the framers of *CCM* were offering their readers was a conception of God that hewed to white standards, without describing it as white. They were creating a concept of what Curtis called 'sacred whiteness,' which "implicitly linked white racial identity to spiritual authority and ownership of the gospel message."[212] The writing of the magazine was not just geared towards Christian music listeners, but towards the artists themselves, reminding them of their priorities as people of faith with influence. The relationship between the aesthetic and theology was an ongoing dialectical process. The magazine needed the music in order to exist, to ponder the role of faith and God in the music and how artists were supposed to respond to culture. But the music also needed the magazine. The artists needed the magazine to give their music worth, to explain what it was doing to an audience that was not smart enough to understand it on its own. It needed the editors to tell them what to do, what they should be doing, and to absolve them when artists were caught in scandal. Both the listeners and artists were being shaped into a theological concept of God that viewed them as ambassadors for him, sent to a culture that was unaware that it needed what they have to offer, but what they primarily had to offer in the 1990s was a white Jesus.

212. Curtis, *The Myth of Colorblind Christians*, 16.

# 3. Revolution Time: Culture War and Warriors

*May the problems of whiteness we have created move us to create a better future for those who come after us.*
– Kaitlin Curtice[213]

In the spring of 1996, the superstar Jesus Christ showed up in Washington D.C. to his own rally. The actor Jeff Fenholt, who originated the role on Broadway, addressed the crowd of teenagers and absent government officials, saying "the youth of this nation are going to hold you accountable. America, there's a move of God coming and it's not coming upon the old ones. It's coming upon the young ones."[214] After that, he introduced the Christian music band, Newsboys, who took the stage. Their concert was part of a 2-day rally called "Washington for Jesus." The rally was focused on declaring the United States guilty of seven "evil giants" of sin, which were homosexuality, abortion, racism, addictions, occultism, AIDS, and persecution of the church.[215] The weekend was beset with bad weather, and was attended by only 75,000 people. Teens learned about the rally from their churches, but they also might have heard about it from an ad in *CCM*. That is where they would have seen a list of speakers and artists making up the political and theological concert, and where they would have learned that they should "reclaim this nation for Jesus Christ."

This chapter examines specific ways the culture wars appeared in the magazine. Using another aspect of subcultural identity theory, it compares the magazine in the 1990s to what it was like in the 80s, showing how the evangelical practice of manufacturing threats was taught to the readers. The evangelical perception that there were forces which opposed them, and from which they needed to live differently and change the political dynamics of, was allowed to exist in the magazine. The content of it promoted an identity of a culture warrior, and through years of messaging, people came to understand that to be a faithful Christian was to be a conservative, Republican, culture warrior. The idea of a culture warrior is divided into five characteristics and this chapter looks at how they appear in *CCM*, showing that the magazine was bound by the culture they were within, regardless of their efforts to critique it.

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[213] Kaitlin B. Curtice, Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2020), 49.
[214] *Newsboys Washington for Jesus 1996 ~Spirit Thing*, 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2eaE9eoXbrY.
[215] Adelle M. Banks, "Evangelicals Rally to Put 'evils' on Trial," The Paducah Sun, May 10, 1996.

## RENEGOTIATED IDENTITIES

Part of Christian Smith's theory on religious subcultural identity included the idea of change. He said that "religious traditions have *always* strategically renegotiated their collective identities by continually reformulating the ways their constructed orthodoxies engage the changing sociocultural environments they confront."[216] This renegotiation occurred throughout evangelicalism as the 1990s developed and the "war for the soul of America," began in earnest. The magazine was not immune to this change, and it reflected how people in the industry took that new mentality to heart.

One way the evangelical world dealt with the changing cultural environment was to create enemies with whom to fight. As Maxwell and Shields write about, the path to creating a Republican stronghold in the American South relied not just on embracing whiteness, but also on an opposition to feminism as they appealed to conservative Christians. As part of their effort, Republicans "needed to manufacture and broadcast new threats."[217] Those threats were discussed as factual realities in the pages of the magazine. Maxwell and Shields mentioned the role of media and popular culture in the effort to grow the Republican base, mentioning radio, books, and tv, all of which "bonded believers while insulating them from nonbelievers."[218] In their brief description though, they put all of Christian media under one umbrella, but there were divisions in Christian culture based on age. While adults had many outlets to access evangelical teachings on a wide variety of topics, by and large the teenage shared culture came through music, making *CCM* an important space of cultural formation for white millennials, and the threats discussed within even more significant.

What is ultimately published in a magazine signifies its worth, simply by virtue of being included. Because magazine publishing is obviously a business, every page has a cost, and so the contents of a magazine indicate what topics are important, creating an agenda for their readers.[219] As a paratext that is used for communal interpretation, fan magazines can serve to "reinforce brand values and producers' preferred textual readings."[220] This influence was important when evangelicals in the 1990s "strongly and disproportionately favored" methods of changing American society that were both about living radically different from others, and working for political changes.[221] So, the contents of the magazine that referred to culture war issues signaled to readers that they were

216. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 97.
217. Maxwell and Shields*, Long Southern Strategy*, 10.
218. Maxwell and Shields*, Long Southern Strategy*, 237-238.
219. Weiss and Sternadori, 57-58.
220. Hills, 295.
221. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 37.

important, and it reaffirmed the messages they were getting from other evangelical outlets. The brand value that was reinforced because of these messages was not for any particular record label, but *CCM* was, unwillingly or not, a brand for conservative white evangelicalism.

Music became a front in the culture wars because it was something to protect children from, and Christian alternatives were a ready solution. Scholar Eileen Luhr focused on this movement as if affected teenagers. Her book, *Witnessing Suburbia*, tells the story of how popular culture became Christianized at the same time that evangelicalism was becoming a suburban faith, and how this politicized evangelical youth culture in the 1980s and '90s. In it she wrote about the ways that most evangelical media wrote about music for parents to read, analyzing secular music to warn against it. But what made *CCM* different from most of these other media writings, is that *CCM* was written for the listeners, and not their parents. Teenagers and young adults were a central consideration for both the artists and magazine.

To understand how the contents of the magazine changed in the 1990s so that it became a space to politicize teens on behalf of the Republican Party, it is helpful to look at the magazine as it was in the 1980s. Former recording artist and Gospel and CCM scholar Tim Dillinger said the 1980s version of *CCM* "reflected a diverse range of perspectives, especially regarding the Reagan administration and the values of an increasingly political church…The publication in the eighties was far from liberal, but did make space for a diversity of voices who did not always tow the party line. There were certainly articles that did, but they were offset by thoughtful and provocative features that questioned the power structures of both the church and the government. The most conservative rhetoric, however, was reflected by the readers who responded to these articles with fervor."[222] When it came to music covered in the 80s, the magazine "reviewed the work of mainstream artists who reflected, what they perceived as, Christian values: Lone Justice, Indigo Girls, and U2 to name a few…Those choices spoke to the editorial focus on bringing external voices to the table, forcing Christians to see a multiplicity of ways that faith could be communicated and places it could be shared."[223] As late as the fall of 1991, the magazine included comments from artists like Terry Taylor and Bruce Cockburn talking about the dangers of nationalism and the dark sides of imperialism.[224] But as the 1990s went on, there was a cultural shift in the evangelical world. That nuanced, diverse perspective couldn't remain when specific political results were the goal.[225] As

222. "Reagan Bashing?", *CCM* November 1988, pg. 6, Dillinger, interview.
223. Dillinger, interview.
224. *CCM*, November 1991.
225. Maxwell and Shields*, Long Southern Strategy*, 34.

the evangelical world made clear, people were supposed to "serve as foot soldiers," because the 1990s were to be "the Civil War Decade."[226] As Hartman explained, "One of the primary assumptions that made someone a conservative partisan in the culture wars was the idea that American culture was in decline."[227] The cumulative effect of renegotiating the evangelical collective identity with manufactured threats and politicized teens was that white evangelical millennial teens became participants in the culture wars, fighting for a white Jesus and the GOP.

### CULTURE WARRIORS

In order for a war, any war, to be fought, people are needed to fight, and in order for a person to effectively fight, certain things must exist. There are five basic aspects to being a warrior, and these aspects as they related to being a culture warrior appeared in the magazine. First, there needed to be a commander - someone with authority who directs the troops. This often was the church, and more specifically the youth pastor and the youth group experience. Secondly, there needed to be an awareness that one was a soldier, and this was presented through the use of spiritual warfare language. Third, there obviously needed to be an enemy. In the magazine this was often described as a hostile culture, or secular values and morals. Fourthly, those fighting needed to be willing to fight. They needed to buy into the significance of the fight. In the culture wars, what was at stake was the future of the United States. And then finally, wars are fought on battlefields. The main front of the culture wars was the protection of family values.

### COMMANDER

Participating in youth group events was a way for the subcultural identity of white evangelical teens to be reinforced, and in that community they also received their marching orders. The youth group experience was a formative one for millions of teenagers, because as Luhr wrote about, youth religiosity "became an important component of conservative efforts to 'reclaim' suburban space for Christian values."[228] While attending youth group may have seemed like a natural, spontaneous church experience, it was actually an intentional, guided one, and those guides were

226. Dobson quoted in Diamond *Not by Politics Alone*, 1-2.
227. Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, 38.
228. Eileen Luhr, . *Witnessing Suburbia: Conservatives and Christian Youth Culture*. First edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009, 101.

often on the minds of recording artists.

In their interviews with the magazine, artists consistently talked about their awareness of their fan base and those who led them at church. Bands such as Grammatrain said "we have a real burden for the youth."[229] The band Considering Lily was described by the magazine as passionately wanting to keep their focus on ministering to the youth.[230] Less well known bands like Dawkins and Dawkins also said what they wanted to do was "affect the lives of young people."[231] Even the more adult contemporary band 4HIM said when they formed, their goal was to evangelize kids.[232] As an indicator of how market goals were consistently in play, when Audio Adrenaline mentioned how it helped to have influential youth pastors supporting Christian music, the magazine noted that when youth pastors did that, "audiences and record sales tend to grow exponentially."[233] This sort of cooperation was why multiple bands would perform at places such as the National Youth Leaders conference, where 1000 Southern Baptist youth leaders were present.[234] Youth leaders guided their students towards the culture wars, but they too were drafted into battle.

Another place where youth leaders and teens were targeted was summer festivals, which were a mainstay of the youth group experience. Those multi-day events featured concerts by many musical artists and included a wide variety of seminars and workshops on topics for students, parents, and youth leaders. Ads for the festivals proliferated in the magazine and they included lists of speakers, nearly all of whom were evangelical and conservative. The magazine itself sponsored the largest Christian festival, Creation in 1993. Other festivals such as DC/LA 94 (Youth for Christ's "superconference on evangelism") featured artists who encouraged kids to "take a stand together for what they believe."[235] Students were often encouraged to 'take their stand' in the place they were at the most, in their schools, and the industry also helped with that.

An example of the efforts between the industry and schools could be seen in 1990, when the Fellowship of Christian Athletes released a CCM album "intended to encourage young Christian athletes and their coaches."[236] Films were also created for Christian and secular high school students. Made by Ken Carpenter and seen as "modern day parables as a way to reach out to an ethically

229. *CCM*, February 1996.
230. *CCM*, April 1997.
231. *CCM*, November 1998.
232. *CCM*, May 1998.
233. *CCM*, February 1998, 22.
234. *CCM*, July 1993.
235. *CCM*, November 1993, 17.
236. *CCM*, February 1990, 21.

needy world," films about social issues featured music by CCM artists.[237] Artists knew schools were a place that kids were surrounded by their friends, and they talked about that as well.[238]

CCM artists told teens that they should also be evangelizing and converting others. Audio Adrenaline wanted them to show their friends that Christianity can be fun, and Petra was showing teens "how to serve the Lord in the capacity he's given you."[239] The band Geoff Moore and the Distance's goal was to "expand the reach of Christianity by getting students to act out their faith and bring in more threads to the body of Christ."[240] Rebecca St. James told kids to be bold and radical about their faith, and the O.C. Supertones said their 1999 tour was more than ever for the kids, because "it's a hard generation to reach."[241] Students were encouraged to convert their friends, but also were given opportunities to perform their piety.

Part of the youth group experience which involved telling others about Jesus meant participating in communal faith events in public, especially at school. This is how events such as See You At The Pole became so representative of evangelical youth culture. This event, where teens would pray around their flagpole at school, was an example of what Luhr described as youth agency "in the cultural battles of the late twentieth century," but this was fueled by the way "conservative adults helped orchestrate many of these confrontations."[242] Bands such as the popular hard rock band Petra supported this event, showing up at a high school for it.[243] The artist who supported the event the most was Al Denson who wrote a song for the event, saying of it "you've got to have something to rally around."[244] Denson's comment also showed how artists were intentionally creating these moments for teens.

Youth leaders were sometimes also targeted specifically such as when a new column in the magazine debuted in which various social topics were addressed. The intention was for youth group leaders to use it "in designing topically-based programs" using CCM songs.[245] Petra also endorsed a Bible, saying "We're committed to releasing things that help this music be integrated into a church

237. *CCM*, November 1992, 11. Carpenter would go on to make various conservative films about abortion, Stonewall Jackson, and a religious liberty film with Mike Huckabee and Eric Metaxas
238. Artists would also talk about how they would get around the rules that stopped them from proselytizing in public schools, showing kids they should be stealthy and deceptive for Jesus.
239. *CCM*, October 1992, *CCM*, April 1997.
240. *CCM*, September 1997, 12.
241. *CCM*, November 1998. *CCM*, February 1999.
242. Luhr, *Witnessing Suburbia,* 101.
243. *CCM*, November 1992, 11.
244. *CCM*, March 1992, 25.
245. *CCM*, September 1991, 4.

setting.[246] All that subsequently helps the youth leaders. That's pretty much where we want to be used, as a tool to help them reach their kids."[247] Going further, Denson created the "Be the One" club, designed to give kids and their friends music and Bibles, while recognizing that youth pastors were the ones who need help to do their work.[248] The work of endorsing Bibles worked both ways, with The New Student Bible sponsoring Denson's tour.[249] The crossover between the Bible and music industries seemed merely religious. But it was easily able to be used in political ways.

Christian long-haired rockers DeGarmo and Key had an ad campaign called Take the Pledge based on their 1989 album *The Pledge*. The campaign not only sold music videos, while telling kids to "take the pledge," based on the lyrics *Turn your heart to Jesus, make this solemn pledge/He died for me, I'll live for Him,* but the ad campaign turned into a pledge to "read the word," and it was paired with a new student version of the NIV Bible.[250] Later this would evolve into a full Bible study curriculum sent to 100,000 church leaders.[251] DeGarmo and Key would later argue based on Barna research that Christian kids were biblically illiterate, and that "we think that largely has to do with how much time they spend privately in God's word."[252] Their attempt at a solution exemplified Luhr's point that "the transformation of Christian youth culture perfectly complemented the legal arguments forwarded by Christian activists."[253] DeGarmo and Key wanted to have a Bible reading marathon, as well as "do our best to get Congress to give us a Day of Bible Reading," similar to the National Day of Prayer.[254] White evangelical teens were targeted by the industry and told from Christian authority figures in their lives in a myriad of ways - at conferences, festivals, school events, churches, in addition to the concerts - who they were and how they should live. These messages showed the importance of these communal activities, all under the umbrella of the youth group.

**SOLDIER**

246. CCM Communications also started the journal Worship Leader in 1992, partnering with Chuck Fromm who was Chuck Smiths' nephew and had been the head of the Maranatha Music label at Calvary Chapel, and this specifically targeted church leaders with Christian music. "Our Founder," *Worship Leader*, https://worshipleader.com/our-founder/.
247. *CCM*, January 1992, 20.
248. *CCM*, March 1992.
249. *CCM*, October 1992.
250. *CCM*, January 1990, *CCM*, September 1991.
251. *CCM*, July 1992, 30.
252. *CCM,* September 1993.
253. Luhr, *Witnessing Suburbia,* 103.
254. *CCM*, July 1993, 34. Eddie DeGarmo would eventually become the owner of one of the most successful CCM record labels, and in his memoir he unintentionally describes how he contributed to maintaining a white and conservative industry.

The culture wars that theoretically separated evangelicals from secular culture also served to strengthen the subculture.[255] As Smith pointed out, religious groups that understood how this conflict worked could "take the initiative to construct situations which strengthen their own religious vitality."[256] The way this dynamic increased in the 1990s could be seen in an ad for a 1989 teen conference. Presumably inspired by the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Youth Alive conference theme was "Tearing Down the Walls," and the content of it was about how "the enemy has brought deceptive walls of separation, peer pressure, loneliness, defeat and other things that hinder that bright light from shining." This conference also featured days of workshops, concerts, conference meetings, drama, youth group meetings, sports, talent searches, as well as bible quizzing, games, and pizza.[257] The theme of it was not culture war issues but instead was aimed at internal issues that teens dealt with. This changed when a new trend in evangelical culture met the culture wars. The notion of 'spiritual warfare' featured prominently in evangelicalism from around 1985-1995 and was promoted primarily through the fiction books of Frank Peretti.[258] Church leaders, writers, and speakers, spread his ideas, and they could also be found in the pages of the magazine.

Warrior language permeated the pages of *CCM*, and it served to turn everyday life into a war which reinforced to the reader that they should be a soldier in it. Examples of this included not just comments made by artists, but also advertisements. There were two non-music related advertisements that noticeably did this. Most advertisements in the magazine were related to the music industry. There were ads for keyboards, guitars, speaker systems, microphones, ads by record labels for artists, ads for booking agents and songwriting opportunities. Even when the magazine occasionally did a book review, it was on a book related to music. So these ads stood out, making the messages even more significant. One ad was for a Peretti book, and it was a bright, full page, attention-grabbing ad for his book *Prophet*.[259] Later in that same issue, there was also an ad for a Nintendo game called *Spiritual Warfare* which said, "You are a modern day believer who must take a stand against wickedness."[260] When it came to editorial decisions on advertising, Styll said they did not control what advertisers wanted to say. "Obviously, we're not going to buy an ad that's talking about something illegal or immoral" but that there were "people who, for whatever reason, felt like our audience was one they wanted to reach with whatever they had, because there weren't that many

255. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 114.
256. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 116.
257. *CCM*, April 1989.
258 Amy Grant was actually the one who helped popularize Frank Peretti.
259. *CCM*, April 1992. Full page ads for his other books when they were published also appear in other issues.
260. *CCM*, April 1992.

vehicles that you could reach those people with….we didn't decide who advertised in the magazine…we were not in a position to turn people down." Styll's statement revealed both the financial realities that motivated acceptance of those ads, but also the makeup of its public. The readers of *CCM* were understood as the logical audience for those messages.

Warfare language was a constant occurrence in the magazine in the 1990s, from ads to artists to the editors. In January 1992, an ad for a new album said "Let's fight for a generation," and "in the battle zone, only the strong will survive. There's a war in the streets…Are you ready?"[261] It was spoken about from the artists themselves and sometimes right in the letter from the editor. In response to issues of fraud and divorce in the industry, Styll said that God was shaking up the industry, and that a satanic attack was happening, "possibly because Christian music may be about ready to marshal an intense attack on the strongholds of darkness;" this idea of attacking the strongholds of darkness drawn directly from Peretti.[262] Spiritual warfare was also mentioned by artists in response to routine events. Singer Michael W. Smith, in response to recording an album and enduring the normal stresses and difficulties of creating a project on a deadline, said "from a spiritual point of view, I was really being attacked. I do believe in spiritual warfare…" saying that Satan was trying to block the messages on his new album.[263] This idea was repeated almost a year later by another artist who, after being randomly mugged said, "I think it was just a wake-up call to realize that the devil longs to sift people."[264] The idea of spiritual warfare was used to turn ordinary events into threats that could be resisted and even defeated.

This idea of warfare and Satan looking to attack Christians helped fuel the idea of Christians fighting back. Artist Steve Camp said, in talking about his album *Taking Heaven By Storm*, "We need to take heaven by storm from the White House to the courthouse to the schoolhouse to the outhouse. In all areas of life, we need to be more sold out to Jesus Christ than the world is to its sin."[265] In one column in 1993, a small label executive said, "I honestly feel that the Lord is speaking to all His saints and telling them to rise, prepare themselves and be ready…be prepared to die for Him and His word." He went on to say that Christians should be boldly speaking truth, bringing hope and encouragement to people. "Lets make a bold stand showing everyone that Christians have

261. *CCM*, January 1992.
262. *CCM*, October 1992, 4.
263. *CCM*, October 1992, 28.
264. *CCM*, September 1993.
265. *CCM*, September 1993.

some convictions and backbone. Not just the extremist groups."[266] A few months later, longtime artist Steve Green said that his life message had a lot to do with "spiritual warfare or struggling against the forces of darkness."[267] And an interview with singer Lisa Bevill in 1995 reiterated this same idea, as she describes her depression and suicidal thoughts after her parents' deaths. She described reading a Peretti novel which helped her target Satan as the cause of her depression. Her reaction to that shows another way music was used on behalf of this idea, saying, "the way I vent my anger now is in concert…you are going to hear what I have to say because I am so angry at what Satan has done."[268] These statements modeled for readers the attitudes they should have and the way music could be used as a weapon. And then, after 1995, explicit spiritual warfare language disappeared from the magazine.[269] Spiritual warfare may have vanished but the warring language didn't. The idea of Satan roaming the world was a mutable idea. He could become anyone or anything, and while he might have been the implicit enemy evangelicals were fighting, they explicitly described who it was they really wanted to defeat.

## ENEMY

The successful act of creating an enemy to defeat was something that was easier to do in a pluralistic society, because there were a variety of beliefs and groups of people. Those conflicts with others actually worked to "strengthen evangelical identity, solidarity, resources mobilization, and membership retention."[270] Just as colorblind theology had its roots in segregation, so too did the idea of threats from specific aspects of secular society have a longer history, with conservative Christians being concerned about liberals and atheists in the 1960s.[271] That history of specific enemies was repeated in 1988 when former Southern Baptist Convention President W. A. Criswell said, "we have lost our nation to the liberals, humanists, and atheists, and infidels."[272] As Maxwell and Shields pointed out, this was politically effective because "fear and rage and resentment…often

266. *CCM*, November 1993, 53.
267. *CCM*, March 1994, 25.
268. *CCM*, April 1995, 62.
269. A look at Christianity Today archives shows that the term sharply drops off in use after 1995 as well. It seems interesting that the drop-off happens after the 1994 elections.
270. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 144.
271. Randall J. Stephens, *The Devil's Music: How Christians Inspired, Condemned, and Embraced Rock "n" Roll* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2018), 130.
272 Maxwell and Shields*, Long Southern Strategy*, 223.

drive more people to the polls than optimism or likability or hope."[273] The real point of creating secular enemies was so that people would vote against them in the name of Jesus. Those ideas articulated by evangelical leaders would be repeated by artists and writers of the magazine for nearly an entire decade. The recurring warrior language reinforced the notion that to be a Christian was to be a soldier in a very specific war, with a specific enemy.

While the magazine often called people to gracefully impact the secular culture with the love of Christ, those calls sat awkwardly alongside explicit warlike language against that culture. In September 1991, Fischer criticized Christians for being too comfortable in their subculture and not doing their own thinking. But as he framed living in a world in which they don't belong, he called it "a hostile world," and said "we need more provoking and we need more provokers."[274] A few months later singer Randy Stonehill said "I think as a Christian, that 'rebelling' is something you hold onto your whole life, because that's something we're called to do - rebel against the darkness around us."[275] Then, a brand new band, Millions & Millions, described the situation as "We should be the ones setting the examples, not letting Guns 'N Roses set the example…Things in our country and in our world have got to change."[276] In that same 1992 issue, singer Eric Champion talked about a "new crusade" in young people, a new attitude that God was raising up in people. While the term 'crusades' had been used as a word to refer to large evangelistic events such as with Billy Graham, the word still had warring connotations. In that same issue, Fischer again critiqued those types of ideas, calling out Christians who were angry at the world. "Too many Christians want an apocalypse now. Too many Christians want a war," he said, frustrated with how they were portraying Christianity.[277] Despite his warnings, the hostile, secular world kept getting called out more specifically.

As it toed the line between encouraging people to be thoughtful readers and keeping them as subscribers, the magazine sometimes explicitly supported these efforts. For example, the column "Roaring Lambs" written by Bob Briner ran for a couple years and described a 'roaring lamb' as someone who seeks "most diligently to impact culture for Christ."[278] One early column was about a Christian professor who was "among the wolves every day." In particular, this professor was a role model because he took on "those proud and haughty professors who champion the neo-Darwinian

273. Maxwell and Shields*, Long Southern Strategy*, 31.
274. *CCM*, September 1991, 54.
275. *CCM*, April 1992, 34.
276. *CCM*, November 1992, 16.
277. *CCM*, November 1992, 78.
278. *CCM*, January 1995, 43.

theories of evolution." This professor wrote a book about Creationism and went on a speaking tour, claiming to strengthen the faith of Christians on secular campuses, and the column called him David, "unafraid of the normally scornful and fearsome academic Goliaths." He ended the column asking the readers "do you find you are ready to go out into the dangerous, but exhilarating places in life, to proclaim who Jesus is and why He came?"[279] This was the creation of an enemy in a supposed hostile world and his question at the end was meant to draw the magazine's public into the fight.

The magazine's process of getting their varied columnists over the years was an unplanned, organic one. Styll said "Going about the world…people would introduce themselves to us and we'd go, 'that's a that's an interesting idea. Would you like to do this [write a column]' and they would say yes or no...It really wasn't like we sat down and said, 'hey, I wonder if we could get Bob Briner to write for us.' We may have, but I don't recall it being that much of an iterative process. It was just. Hey, that sounds cool. We like that. Let's do it."[280] That spontaneous occurrence revealed just how much the magazine was participating in the environment they were trying to critique. The magazine constantly went back and forth, revealing the tension that they were balancing between immersion in evangelical culture and critique of it.

Hostility sometimes appeared as explicitly political – showing an antagonism towards Democrats, revealing how the idea that to be a Christian was to be a Republican spread through evangelical culture. In 1993 the band Whiteheart said that their listeners were "trained to be spoon fed," and that people wanted to be served all the time. "Somehow we've got this feeling that everyone should be satisfied, everyone has a public right to health, the pursuit of TV channels and all the happiness that will ensue after that. We somehow have become a service society."[281] Their comment about health seems to have been referring to Hillary Clinton's universal health care plan, which had been fought for all that year. In the album review for Whiteheart's album "Highlands," which they had been promoting in that interview, the reviewer noted a theme was "disenchantment with the secular media and political leadership."[282] The example of Whiteheart showed how explicit political issues became embedded in songs of faith, but sometimes the political talk was even more upfront.

In one issue there was an ad for a dance album that said "Politically Incorrect. Alternative

279. *CCM*, April 1995, 28.
280. Styll, interview.
281. *CCM*, November 1993, 42.
282. *CCM*, November 1993, 68.

band seeking fellow ditto heads." As 1990s culture warriors knew, 'ditto heads' was the term Rush Limbaugh used for his audience.[283] A later letter to the editor asked about the album, hoping for a second one, but the response from the magazine was that it was a one time album, and that it was "offering a challenging voice to the so called 'politically correct' perspective currently afoot in American culture," and in this way, the magazine also offered up their view, insinuating that being politically correct was wrong.[284]

In October 1996, the month before the presidential election, there was an article about being politically active Christian citizens. The article covered themes such as Freedom and Patriotism, and recommended books about both the right and the left in Christian politics. But the people chosen for the article seemed unusual and included people who were not in CCM such as Charlie Daniels and a random person who volunteered at the Salvation Army. People interviewed said that Christians should be involved in politics and vote, but they also said that politics had its limits and that relying on politics to change people's hearts on issues like abortion was not the way to go, saying "Changing hearts is something that only Jesus and the church can do." One artist did point out that America being founded as a Christian nation wasn't accurate. But at the end of the article, there was a sidebar saying that although the goal of the article was to provide balanced coverage of the political race, "no one interviewed for this story supported the Democratic Party…we suspect that Christian artists feel compelled to fit into a box created by a largely conservative audience."[285] What message was the reader supposed to take from this except that if it was acceptable to be a Democrat and a Christian, surely some of those people who served as role models for how to follow Jesus would be one? While this article presumably meant to show both sides, it just served to reaffirm the collective identity of Christian equaling Republican.

As the 1990s went on, the overt political tone waned, and the hostility became less intense, and targeted instead towards the secular culture at large. In a thoughtful article on music and culture by William Romanowski, he also includes the claim that "the mainstream entertainment industry still operates on the false assumption that public life is, or ought to be, free of religious convictions."[286] He then talks about how Christians, by living better, can show 'those people' that having religious and moral convictions is ok. So even in a more progressive article like this, there is still a divide between Christians who have morals and secular people who do not. They do not present the idea

283. *CCM*, March 1994.
284. *CCM*, April 1995, 8.
285. *CCM*, October 1996, 46.
286 *CCM*, May 1998, 47.

as different people simply having different morals. Another time, a member of the band Audio Adrenaline was worried that young people were "lured into the philosophy of tolerance," and said it was wrong to be tolerant of another religion if you believed in Jesus; "when people think of Christianity as intolerant, I just think of it as sticking to my convictions."[287] Fischer, in his columns in the late 1990s pushed back against this, saying that Christians shouldn't separate themselves from sinful people - that Christians needed to love the sinners who were their neighbors, and that they needed to be straddlers of culture - citizens of both heaven and earth.[288]

But earlier, in the thick of the political air, in that same issue that featured no Democrats, Fischer echoed what Criswell had said years before. His column at the conclusion of the October 96 issue, right before the election, was about the story of Jonah. In it he said, "I wonder what would happen if for some mysterious reason all the perceived enemies of Christians right now - the pro-choice supporters, gay rights activists, militant feminists and secular humanists in this country, to name a few - suddenly ended up in church? What if God decided to give them all a soft heart toward Him? What would we do? How would we react? Would this be cause for great rejoicing or would we go off and sulk somewhere?"[289] While this column served to critique the Christians who were antagonistic and full of moral indignation, it also served to again establish who it was that was considered Christian and who was not, and everyone knew it had political implications.

### WILLINGNESS TO FIGHT

While the contents of the magazine were helping to train people to see the secular world as hostile and as an enemy, in order to do battle against it, teens needed to have a sense of the significance of the fight as motivation. As the decade wore on, the significance would take on a heavier sense of obligation, and require more action than just voting. Teenagers would learn they were the generation on whom people relied to save society. It was as if teenagers themselves could save those who they believed were "narcissistic, licentious, and [had] self-destructive values," instead of the one they believed had already died for people.[290]

In the 1990s, more than any other Protestant sect, evangelicals were the most prepared to

287. *CCM*, February 1998.
288. *CCM*, May 1998, *CCM*, February 1999.
289 John Fischer, "What If Everyone Came," *CCM*, October 1996, 102.
290.Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 131.

exert influence in a way that they knew could cause tension and conflict.[291] In a 1994 interview with Steve Green he said, "In our nation particularly, we're crumbling from within…I think [the solution] is revival…that has to happen to the church as a whole to affect society."[292] What Green said, which was similar to what many other bands said, was a means of having religious goals for political reasons. In Philip Gorski and Samuel Perry's book about white Christian nationalism, *The Flag and The Cross*, they describe the roots of conservative white evangelical beliefs which influenced that ideology. They name three beliefs as being important: a belief in color-blindness, a focus on sexual sin, and a strong belief in the apocalypse, and the way evangelicals viewed the potential loss of America had apocalyptic overtones.[293]

The way they talked about it was general enough that anything could be a reason the nation was crumbling. The political undertones of their spiritual strivings could also be seen in this statement by the hard rock band Whiteheart. "I think the world is changing at a personal level. That's the way Jesus changes hearts….I really feel change takes place at a personal level."[294] The point then, of converting people to evangelical Christianity or to encourage them to be more faithful followers was not simply to increase heaven's population. It was to change the cultural life in the United States. But in order to get people to the point where they were willing to die for their beliefs, or even to engage the fight with a desire to win, they needed to feel that the cost was high enough.

Cultural enemies were in one sense, very vague. A concept was created, a belief was made, and the enemy was someone who disagreed. But it could be anyone who disagreed. There was no singular person who could be pointed to that was the singular enemy. The enemy of the evangelical culture warrior was a 'they' somewhere who stood in affront to the culture warrior's beliefs. In 1991 Twila Paris, one of the industry's foundational singers with 33 No. 1 singles, described that enemy saying, "this country was really founded on Christian principles. That is the reason God has blessed this country for so long. Nowadays people would have us forget that. There's a tie between the spiritual and the political…there is a correlation between the people who died for this country in wars and Christ dying for freedom."[295] She said people would have us forget this connection. But who is people? The opacity of the enemy creates space for the imagination to flourish.

Interviews with artists were also important because they were not transcriptions. These were

291.Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 133.
292. *CCM*, March 1994, 35.
293 Philip S. Gorski, Samuel L. Perry, and Jemar Tisby, *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2022), 69.
294. *CCM,* November 1993.
295. *CCM,* November 1991.

edited pieces of writing where statements were either cut or kept. While the magazine saw itself as a place to let artists speak their mind, "we're not going to edit the story so that everybody looks good all the time," surely artists also said things that didn't make it into the interview. As magazine scholars have shown, "by merely appearing in the media, one is deemed to be important."[296] Singer Eric Champion, in talking about his new album *Revolution Time*, said that all of the problems of the world were "pointed toward young kids," and that he wanted "to get young people to become activists, not pacifists, because if not, our rights are going to be taken away."[297] A couple months later, 4HIM talked about their hit song "Basics of Life," which said it was timely for the nation because, "we're in a very decadent age, and we've lost a lot of our push for morals." They went on to lament kids not praying in school and movies not being wonderful and pure anymore. They then said, "I think we're dangerously close in America to having what little rights we have as Christians taken away…We are looking at a situation that can only worsen if our country's heart doesn't change."[298] These interviews with artists were edited so that what the magazine considered the most valuable parts were included. This interview with 4HIM coincided with their album release entitled *The Basics of Life*. The titular song was about getting back to the basics of following Jesus because they saw their lives as Americans as changed from what it had been; *where are the morals/that governed our lives*. The song lyrics sounded very spiritual. But when paired with their interview, the true point was made clear. Getting back to the basics of *a faith that is fervently grounded in Christ* really meant getting back to a country where a specific white version of God was in control.

Teens who read these issues learned over time that not only was there a war going on, but their future way of life would be threated if they didn't win. When asked about the possibility of teenage readers being influenced in a way to become an activist, and the potential pitfalls of neutrally allowing artists to speak their mind, Styll said, "I don't know that we would have thought about it in terms of activism. We thought about it in terms of cultural relevance. We wanted to impact the culture. At this point, I don't even know if that was right, but back then, we did the best we knew how to try to impact popular music."[299] But to be culturally relevant in the midst of a war was to be an activist.

The conflict that allowed evangelicalism to flourish took shape in this vague imaginative space, leading to success for those who could most effectively exploit it. As Smith said, religious

296. Weiss and Sternadori, 53.
297. *CCM*, September 1991, 16.
298. *CCM*, January 1993, 21.
299 Styll, interview.

groups "can themselves actually take the initiative to construct situations which strengthen their own religious vitality."[300] In early 1993, an album review for the readers' favorite new alternative band Uthanda wrote about one song, "Citizen," and said the band's point was that "perhaps we shouldn't consider ourselves citizens of a country no longer guided by godly principles."[301] In 1994, at the 25th annual Gospel Music Association Dove Awards, the award for Inspirational Song of the Year went to singer Ray Boltz for a song called, "I Pledge Allegiance to the Lamb." The song was released along with a music video, and the video included scenes of a father and son talking in a futuristic jail-like setting. The father was eventually taken away by guards, apparently to be killed, because he was a Christian. The magazine described this video as "depicting an ominous prophecy of religious persecution in future America under the guise of political correctness carried to its logical conclusion."[302] In his interview, Boltz described the reasoning behind the song, saying, "given the present attitude of our government, the time is now when we could be arrested and even punished for our Christian values and beliefs."[303] Enemies, according to the content in the magazine, were those people who wanted to take the United States away from its Christian roots and punish Christians for the beliefs they lived out. A song such as "I Pledge Allegiance to the Lamb" was not simply about being a devoted Christian. It was about causing anxiety in the listener, teaching them to see the world around them as a threatening enemy, one that could be defeated by changing the government. Using the lens of interpretive communities makes visible the political implications of these messages about warfare, enemies, and rights.

As the 1990s went on, this idea of persecution increased. In 1998 the young artist Rebecca St. James said, "I think one of our biggest problems as a generation is selfishness."[304] The article also described the essence of her message as being about the idea that Jesus wanted everything from people, and that there were a lot of demands when following him. In that same issue, artist Fernando Ortega continued that idea saying "When you embrace God, you embrace a consuming fire."[305] That idea of violence and personal sacrifice continued in the late '90s. The cover of the February 1999 issue said "the Supertones storm beaches everywhere with a message for the masses." In that article about their new album they talked about how the music industry contradicted the heart of Christianity because of the ease of fame and adulation. "There's no persecution, no

300. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 116.
301. *CCM*, April 1993, 102.
302. *CCM,* May 1994. So they did think being politically correct was wrong.
303. *CCM,* May 1994. Boltz would later be kicked out of the Christian music industry for revealing that he was gay
304. *CCM*, November 1998, 28.
305. *CCM*, November 1998, 44.

suffering. The trials we face are nothing," compared to what people in the Bible dealt with. In that same issue, the letter from the editor talked about the idea of being a living sacrifice and said, "what would I be willing to sacrifice for God?" In April of 1999, the letter from the editor opened with the phrase, "I will be that hero." Said in the context of talking about friendship, nonetheless, it fit into that idea of sacrifice, and was notable for what would happen later that month. While these ideas of sacrifice came from the Bible, they also showed how evangelicals were embracing a persecution complex.

Those ideas, while obviously spoken without knowing what was to come on April 20, 1999, help explain how and why the tragedy of Columbine took off in the evangelical teenage world the way it did. For an entire decade Christian students had been taught that Satan was waging war, that there was a secular world to battle, that the entirety of American society was set against their way of life. Then, finally, supposedly, someone was executed at school for being a Christian.[306] Of course the "She Said Yes" cottage industry sprung up, helped along by Christian music, of course, with Michael W. Smith releasing the song, "This Is Your Time."[307] The magazine, too, supported this mentality. Fischer's commentary about Columbine in July 1999 said "many agree American society is on a slide." And because of that Christians would keep separating themselves from secular society, because parents "don't want to send their children off to a war zone every day." Yet he argued that Christians should not withdraw, because then the world might grow even worse. He said that Christians should stay in public schools because of the example of Cassie Bernall; "We may not be able to stop the moral slide in America, but we can represent Christ in it…our greatest witness may come at the hand of the grim reaper."[308] That was a heavy weight to put on teenagers. But every war has casualties, and in the battle for a white Christian society, even Christian teenagers were expendable.

### BATTLEFIELD

With this understanding that both the United States and evangelism were at stake, teens were also made aware what the battlefield was. In reading the magazine, teens received a lot of neutral information about artists such as what secular tv shows artists made appearances on, or what

306. In the end, confusingly, two girls became part of this story, Rachel Scott the other one.
307. *CCM*, December 1999.
308. *CCM*, July 1999, 70.

sports events they were invited to.[309] There were also plenty of messages that were innocuous about faith, such as trusting God, being kind, and accepting that life can be painful sometimes. But woven into all of it were little threads indicating that they were part of a larger story of redemption. Yes, they could be witnesses for a God who wanted to save people from hell, but they could also be witnesses for a God who wanted to save America from the Democrats. In April 1995, the lead singer of the band Audio Adrenaline said, "The hypocrisy of our nation is incredible. We champion personal causes and almost give medals to those who demonstrate for homosexual rights, women's rights, and animal rights, but when it comes to a Christian singing or preaching about God and telling others about Christ, all the doors slam shut at once."[310] In the culture wars, the battlefield was largely the realm of family values. This was where teens learned the importance of heterosexuality and purity culture, knew to be against abortion and to support patriarchy in marriage. To fight for family values was not to fight for the families described in the Bible. Instead it meant to vote for a whole host of Republican policies.

While an individual member of a public may be an incurious sort as Warner says, when they participate in the act of becoming part of the public and build a collective identity through engaging with the messages sent in a magazine, they are not doing it passively. Meaning making in a culture takes place as a discourse between the media and the consumer. A reader willfully engages with the messages being sent.[311] By pairing rhetoric about warfare with numerous interviews and opinions about being an effective witness for Jesus, readers were being taught that standing up for Jesus meant standing against a secular, Democratic society.

Part of this communal interpretation was continually created through marginalizing and excluding certain viewpoints, and converting the margins into the center so as not to destabilize the whole project.[312] Even though both the music and the magazine could be reducible to objects of consumer culture, what made them an effective binding agent for a subculture is that they included "socially and historically embedded values."[313] Those values included the evangelical beliefs that God's moral standards were superior to secular culture and nowhere were those values more threatened and in need of defense than when it came to 'family values.'[314]

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309. For an industry that routinely claimed to be ignored by secular society, they were actually pretty active in participating in it!
310. Perucci Ferraiuolo, "Prayer in School: Issue Stirs Many to Voice Opinions," *CCM*, April 1995, 32.
311. Weiss 177.
312. Hills, 296-297.
313. Hills, 298.
314. Smith, *American Evangelicalism*, 130.

*CCM* was just one part of the arena of youth culture that "became the basis for Christian conservatives' mission to restore 'family values' to American society."[315] And because the term was so vague and malleable and because anything could become a danger to a family, supporting family values became a way of supporting "all things Republican, including a hawkish foreign policy, and all somehow get wrapped in scripture. It also melds into an opposition to Democrats so intense that the Christian faith of Democratic candidates is denied or rejected."[316] The battlefield that the culture wars were fought on were largely in the arenas of protecting the family, through purity culture, abortion, and heterosexuality, and the schools, and teenage readers learned that to be a true Christian was to enter the fray and defend the faith.

In July 1992 there was an ad for a new album called *Generation 2 Generation*. The tagline for the ad said, "Never have times torn at the fabric of family life the way they have in this decade." But it was only July of 1992! The decade was only 2.5 years old. And to what were they comparing this tearing apart of family life? Surely in American history there were more times when family life was irreparably damaged. A couple of months after that, a column about family values covered the album. The column claimed to be discussing the issue not in the political realm, but in the musical one. It discussed the album in detail, talking about the lessons about good families that could be learned from the songs, and acknowledged that even Christian families could be painful. Concluding with that thought the author said, "even children of deeply troubled families can learn to break the chains of pain and create new families that operate on God's family values." The family values in those songs included not just loving parenting but also heterosexuality and sex only within marriage, and by calling it 'God's family values,' what had been merely musical became political.[317]

Family values were often specifically discussed with mentions of breakups of family, fatherhood, and of course divorce.[318] At the beginning of an interview in 1993, the author first set the scene by describing the world as she saw it. "We wake up in 1993 to a nation where families are crumbling, drugs are conquering and Christians are caving in to the world's standards."[319] In the review of Uthanda's album in 1993, the magazine highlighted their song "Heroes," which "laments the splintering of the modern family."[320] Then there was an interview with father/son duo Aaron and Jeoffry in which they said "the decay of our culture is proof that fatherhood is man's highest

315. Luhr, *Witnessing Suburbia,* 29.
316. Maxwell and Shields, *The Long Southern Strategy,* 290.
317. *CCM*, September 1992, 37.
318. Sandi Patti and Amy Grant famously being women artists who got divorced and subsequently raked over the coals.
319. *CCM* January 1993, 21.
320. *CCM*, April 1993.

call."[321] The band Undercover described complex problems facing teenagers, saying they were so much worse than they were 10-20 years ago. "There's a documented decline in morals and values among teenagers," they said, but how was that measured?[322] Who was documenting the decline and what were the standards for it? In 1994, the popular singer Steven Curtis Chapman described this decline by saying, "we started taking prayer out of the schools and out of our culture…Twenty years ago our biggest problems were gum chewing...Now it's carrying AK-47s in your gym bag."[323] Chapman based his claim on an extreme misunderstanding of a magazine article, and a mythical list of problems circulated in the evangelical world.[324] Artists were manufacturing problems and teenagers were being told that to prove their Christianity, they should be living in such a way that they were not representative of this decline, and in so many ways they proved it by adhering to those ideas of family values.

The patriarchal view of gender roles was also central to this. In Wes King's interview in 1993, he talked about being newly married and affirmed what he believed God said about the patriarchal roles of men and women. He also talked about hoping to help Christians look at "their worldview from a strictly biblical perspective." He thought "the '90s society is caught up in a man-centered ideal," which was contrary to what the Bible said.[325] Female artists were often asked about submission, such as when Crystal Lewis is asked about it and in her answer she said, "if I were not submissive to him, as the Bible teaches…in the end, I know I have to submit."[326] There was never any question about how women were supposed to behave.

Purity culture was also a constant presence in the magazine, often through information about the True Love Waits movement. Throughout the 1990s Josh McDowell spread this abstinence message through concerts and conferences but also with videos with public high schools and appearances with artists like Petra.[327] In an article about True Love Waits, artists worked with the Baptist Sunday School Board and Interlinc to release an album about abstinence before marriage. While promoting the project, dcTalk member Toby McKeehan said, "Sex is one of the things that's tearing our nation apart."[328] In addition, teens were reminded that purity culture was also about being heterosexual. In a 1991 article discussing the tension of 'secular' ideas in Christian

321. *CCM*, January 1995.
322. *CCM*, October 1992, 42.
323 Hefner, April. "Steven Curtis Chapman's Real World." *CCM*, August 1994, 29.
324 Sally Duncan, "A Real World Legacy: Steven Curtis Chapman and Settler Colonialism" (2019).
325. *CCM*, April 1993, 80.
326. *CCM*, November 1993.
327. *CCM*, April 1989.
328. *CCM*, November 1993, 18.

music, the author says that God has called some things good, such as "heterosexual, chaste, romantic love," setting boundaries around what is considered sin and what is considered good.[329] But if a girl did fail at purity culture and end up pregnant, she definitely had to keep the baby.

Anti-abortion messages also proliferated, such as in a column talking about abortion vs adoption. The author described pro-abortion people as those people in 2 Timothy when talking about people in the end times. The reader learns that people who support abortion are, "'People who are lovers of themselves, boastful, unthankful, with no natural affections, high-minded, lovers of pleasure instead of God.' They are simply people who have distorted and stretched the idea of freedom until it completely exempts them of any responsibility for their actions. The moral decay in their hearts has caused them to lose value in human life."[330] A 1992 a column on abortion said that a woman's womb is "more dangerous than a warzone…The most dangerous place in America today is in a mother's womb."[331] Ads in the magazine for summer festivals also listed the speakers at them, and they often included anti-abortion activists such as Gianna Jessen and Rob Schneck.[332] Readers of the magazine clearly learned that to be a Christian meant one had to be against abortion.

The protection of kids was also part of 'family values.' Luhr said "both youth innocence and youth agency became important tactics for advancing the evangelical cause," and this could be seen when singer Susan Ashton said "I think the circumstances of life are harder for kids at a younger age now, and they're being required to make more adult decisions, because of broken homes, or their environment and surroundings….they were meant to be innocent, and kids are not innocent anymore."[333] The insidious nature of evangelical culture warriorism turned theological and spiritual issues into contemporary politics, leaving practitioners to assume that to be a Christian was to have a certain set of political beliefs. John Styll, John Fischer, record label executives and the celebrity artists themselves all functioned as spiritual authorities guiding their teenage readers towards being the best, most faithful Christian they could be.

Evangelicalism is a form of Christianity that is very individual focused. One of the arguments Christian Smith makes in his book is that this lack of communal cohesiveness is one of the reasons that evangelicals had not converted the United States to Christianity. But what Smith

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329. *CCM*, November 1991, 35.
330. *CCM*, July 1989.
331. *CCM*, March 1992.
332. Schneck recently has admitted the close way the anti-abortion movement worked to influence judges - Sarah McCammon, "Former Evangelical Activist Says He 'pushed the Boundaries' in Supreme Court Dealings," *NPR*, December 8, 2022, sec. Politics, https://www.npr.org/2022/12/08/1141546218/supreme-court-leaks-reverend-rob-schenk-dobbs-hobby-lobby. *CCM*, February 1990, *CCM*, May 1997.
333. *CCM*, April 1992, 40. Luhr, *Witnessing Suburbia,* 23.

misses, writing as he was in 1998 using surveys completed in 1995 and 1996, was that the culture warrior aspect was not about 'changing the world for Christ'; it was about changing it for the GOP. One way the sense of individualism was corralled into a form of community effort was through the work of magazines. Evangelicals, while being something distinct and separate from traditional mainline denominations, actually included people across the denominational spectrum. Rather than creating a specific denomination, evangelicalism created a theological space for various individuals, churches, and organizations to gather, creating "a distinct publicly recognizable collective identity."[334] The work of *CCM*, because it was not part of a denomination, instead reflected that generic evangelical theology which allowed this spectrum of readers to gather, participating in creating this collective identity.

The aspects of being a culture warrior overlapped a bit – to believe the cost was high enough to join the fight, one needed to think the enemy was dangerous enough. A constant reinforcement of enemy and stakes was needed because in an interpretive community, the production of meaning is constantly in motion, and "the community's norms need to be constantly re-produced and shored up."[335] While this could exclude people who do not agree with the norms, for the center, it could produce strong commitment. This was important because just because someone read *CCM* did not mean that they were going to start believing in angels and demons or become a Republican voter. But the aim of the magazine was directed toward the center, and the cultural values reflected in it showed how so many people in the industry perpetuated the idea that America was in danger, and they could save it, and that saving the nation was what it meant to be a faithful Christian.

334. Luhr, *Witnessing Suburbia,* 15.
335. Hills 296.

# CONCLUSION

## Until My Heart Caves In

*We live as if we are afraid acknowledging the past will tighten the chains of injustice rather than break them.*
– Austin Channing Brown [336]

The number of white evangelicals in the United States has dramatically decreased over the last two decades. Research on the Exvangelical and Deconstructing communities is largely anecdotal. But it is a testament to the strength of the evangelical political movement that when millennials find themselves changing beliefs and leaving the Republican Party, they also leave the evangelical church. And it is a commentary on the insidiousness nature of white supremacy in the evangelical church that when millennials leave evangelicalism, they also leave Jesus. Those movements are full of anger, often rightfully so, but their claims that Jesus is merely a tool for power and shouldn't be followed betrays a deep sense of ignorance that the majority of the world's Christians live in the global South and are not white.

If the evangelical movement hadn't been so resistant to the Black Christian perspective in the United States, perhaps more white millennials would have learned from the deep embodied experience of faith that the Black church has to offer. If the Christian music industry had put as much effort into repenting and repairing their own sins as much as they did in manufacturing the faults of others, maybe the racial-religious-political dynamic would look different now.

The industry even provided itself with that opportunity. As Randall Stephens shows in his book, *The Devil's Music*, in the 1980s, the Christian music industry spent a lot of energy fighting the church, convincing them to accept Christian rock, while televangelists railed against it. But by the end of the decade, those battles had been won. As this thesis has shown, culture war issues consumed a lot of energy during the 1990s. And with that decade ended, and the battle against secular society lost, the industry shifted from caring about others to caring about themselves.

There was a shift in tone in the magazine around 1999, coinciding with the rise of the worship industry and the decline of the culture wars. As the band Switchfoot said in 2000, reflecting both the old and new mentality, "I think that contemporary Christian culture is just as guilty as the

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[336] Austin Channing Brown, *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness*. (New York, NY: Convergent Books, 2018), Kindle, 117.

outside world of being stagnant and completely complacent with our situation…I do think that God is stirring the hearts of our generation."[337] Reviews in the magazine reveal how albums were changing too. The alternative-adjacent band Bleach had their third album described as, "opting for the more singing-to-God vertical method rather than the pointing-humanity-to-God horizontal songwriting approach."[338] In late 2000, there was an ad for worship music for youth leaders to use with their students, the product called 'Outcry.' The ad said, "in the midst of a world of sin and chaos comes an outcry from the heart of a new generation."[339] They were backing off from their calls towards judgement of the wider world and instead were turning inward, creating the perfect opportunity for true reflection.

There are people who think the turn to worship music was natural – John Styll is one of them.[340] But while streaming music and illegal downloading impacted the industry, secular music didn't stop making pop music. While the technology and quality of music since 2000 has changed, and not always for the better, there are still countless numbers of diverse artists creating successful music. The Christian music industry could have kept creating pop and rock music. It is not a stretch of the imagination to think the Christian music industry in the 1990s existed for political purposes.

More research is needed to study the industry as a whole. How did Southern Baptists beliefs impact the culture? Did the albums released by bands, especially popular ones, support the culture wars trajectory? How were label executives creating and enforcing the standards of whiteness, and how did their backgrounds influence the way they approached the industry? And did these culture wars so create a warrior identity in evangelicals that when a real war appeared before them, they eagerly embraced it?[341] Styll said that the magazine "might have actually been in a way, in the way we wanted to influence culture may have been sort of like Christian nationalism."[342] While the magazine did contribute to that, it also did reflect a larger world not entirely within their control.

When asked what was meant by the idea the magazine espoused about influencing the culture, Styll said, "it was just having a voice in the world at large. And having a biblical point of view getting a hearing in the public square." What Styll envisioned was having a magazine that was less about covering Carman and more about covering bands like U2 – a biblical point of view that was less dogmatic and more nuanced. What he wanted was for the music to get the respect of the

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[337] *CCM*, January 2001, 35.
[338] *CCM*, January 2000, 52.
[339] *CCM*, November 2000.
[340] Styll, interview.
[341] I obviously think the answer is yes. *White Music, White Jesus* will explore all of these issues.
[342] Styll, interview.

secular world – and to have been good enough in the first place to have deserved it.[343] The difficulties he had with that shows just how difficult it was to oppose the evangelical machine.

When the artists and the writers gave instructions on what it looked like to be a devout Christian, they were also giving instructions on what a devout believer was not. And what a devout believer was not was many things, one of which was passive. For what a teenager in the 1990s discovered in the pages of the magazine was that the world they could see was not the whole of reality. There was also an invisible world of spirits and angels, of God and Satan, and they were fighting, and the spiritual fight could ultimately be won in the political arena. During that decade, Republicans, evangelicals, and the Christian music industry realized that being a culture warrior was politically effective. By the time of the presidential elections in 1996, *CCM* couldn't even find a Christian musician who supported the Democrats for an article about the importance of Christians voting. Ultimately, in the pages of *CCM,* what white evangelical teenagers learned was that to be a good Christian in the 1990s, one was to *Grab a sword because it's like a war/On moral pollution/Bang! It's a revolution.*[344]

[343] Amy Grant receiving the Kennedy Center Honors at the end of 2022 is the greatest example of this.
344. *CCM*, October 1992.

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