

# Double Authenticity: Celebrity, Consumption, and the Christian Worship Music Industry

BY NATHAN MYRICK

## Introduction

In the years since the turn of the twenty-first century, a new form of music ministry has developed. Often characterized by rock and pop musics and especially by concert style production utilizing recent technological innovations, the new form has quickly grown to become one of the most popular and rapidly expanding models of evangelical protestant worship in the United States. Often historically associated with megachurches such as Willow Creek and Gateway Church,<sup>1</sup> and with charismatic and Pentecostal worship traditions,<sup>2</sup> this sort of music ministry has been adopted by evangelical churches of all sizes and geographic regions, and has even had some influence in mainline congregations.<sup>3</sup>

In what follows, I examine and analyze the salient features of this new model of congregational song leadership. My examination begins with a historical study of the emergence of the new model, highlighting impulses from both ecclesial and cultural institutions. I then examine the philosophical undercurrents of these impulses, indicating points of convergence between various strands of rationale and value. Finally, I examine how the central criterion of “authenticity” impels both a style of production and an impulse to produce new artifacts on the part of the churches who employ this model.

I have chosen to call this the “Celebrity Model” of music ministry. The word “celebrity” often carries negative connotations, yet as Barry Taylor points out, celebrity is an integral part of current American culture; a crucial means of authenticating a person, event, or object.<sup>4</sup> For my purposes

<sup>1</sup>Lester Ruth, “Worship in an Age of Reconstruction: Introduction,” *Liturgy* 32, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 1–2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2016.1229428>; Lester Ruth, “The Eruption of Worship Wars: The Coming of Conflict,” *Liturgy* 32, no. 1 (2017): 3–6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2016.1229431>.

<sup>2</sup>Swee Hong Lim and Lester Ruth, *Lovin’ on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2017).

<sup>3</sup>Deborah R. Justice, “Sonic Change, Social Change, Sacred Change: Music and the Reconfiguration of American Christianity” (Indiana University, 2012), <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/pqdtglobal/docview/1037812173/abstract/E2CDA6C82DBB43D1PQ/1>; Deborah R. Justice, “The Curious Longevity of the Traditional–Contemporary Divide: Mainline Musical Choices in Post–Worship War America,” *Liturgy* 32, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 16–23, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2016.1229438>.

<sup>4</sup>Barry Taylor, *Entertainment Theology: New-Edge Spirituality in a Digital*

here, celebrities are people who inhabit places of substantial popular influence and communicative value;<sup>5</sup> people who are widely known and valued, either for what they have done (“achieved celebrity”) or for who they are (ascribed celebrity); abstractly, it is the “accumulation of attention capital.”<sup>6</sup> Celebrity may be good or bad, but it is neither inherently; instead, it is a reality of life for twenty-first century Americans.

The Celebrity Model arises out of a convergence of contemporary worship music, technological developments such as IMAG, Ableton, Spotify, and YouTube, the success of the Christian music industry’s adoption of Modern Worship due to what Monique Ingalls calls the “British Invasion” in the late 1990s,<sup>7</sup> and what Anna Nekola has identified as the integration of consumerism with evangelical political and social ideals in twentieth and twenty-first century North America.<sup>8</sup> This convergence is configured by what Lynn Schofield Clark calls “Religious Lifestyle Branding,” the process by which the populace of a consumer culture self-identifies with religious ideals through the possession and consumption of religious artifacts.<sup>9</sup> Possession and consumption become, for those who inhabit this lifestyle, the primary means of what Ingalls calls “authentication,” or the process by which objects and persons are evaluated for trustworthiness.

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*Democracy, Cultural Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 149–55.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Chris Rojek, “Celebrity,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Consumption and Consumer Studies* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118989463.wbeccs036.10.1002/9781118989463.wbeccs036>.

<sup>7</sup>Monique M. Ingalls, “Transnational Connections, Musical Meaning, and the 1990s ‘British Invasion’ of North American Evangelical Worship Music,” in *Oxford Handbooks Online*, ed. Jonathan Dueck and Suzel Ana Reily, vol. Oxford Handbook of Music and World Christianities, 2015, 425–45, [http://www.academia.edu/download/44004642/Ingalls\\_2013\\_-\\_Transnational\\_Connections.pdf](http://www.academia.edu/download/44004642/Ingalls_2013_-_Transnational_Connections.pdf).

<sup>8</sup>Anna E. Nekola, “Negotiating the Tensions of U.S. Worship Music in the Marketplace,” in *Oxford Handbooks Online*, ed. Jonathan Dueck and Suzel Ana Reily, vol. Oxford Handbook of Music and World Christianities, 2015, 513–29.

<sup>9</sup>Lynn Schofield Clark, “Identity, Belonging, and Religious Lifestyle Branding (Fashion Bibles, Bhangra Parties, and Muslim Pop),” in *Religion, Media, and the Marketplace*, ed. Lynn Schofield Clark (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 1–33.

The convergence of this triad of 1) media lifestyle marketing of an ecclesial practice, 2) personal religious identification in and through the possession of the objects this marketing strategy produced, and 3) the authenticating effect of “celebrity” on religious music consumerism resulted in a unique, but not unprecedented, model of music ministry. Previously unnamed, I hope that this essay will offer a suitable handle by which the practice can continue to be discussed. From the outset, my efforts are directed towards the goal of greater understanding and care in practice, and not towards a critique of some perceived malfeasance in Christianity. I hope the reader will see this concern throughout.

## Historical Development of the Model

### REVIVALIST ANTECEDENTS

The Celebrity Model of music ministry as I am describing it here is not without precedent, although its trajectory must be understood as one of convergence, and not linear cause and effect (as will be made clear below).<sup>10</sup> The model has some roots in the Sunday School movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but more closely reflects the values of the revivalist models that characterized the evangelical revivals of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The revival service, while originally a multi-day affair, developed into a rather standardized format involving a period of singing that culminated in the delivery of the gospel message. This template has proven sufficiently robust to be applied broadly in church services today, and it is used across denominational lines, from “Seeker Services”<sup>11</sup> to “Sandy Creek Tradition”<sup>12</sup> Baptist churches. Recognition of music’s power in this regard is not unique to nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin similarly recognized its power, although they had different conclusions as to what role music should play in worship. Similarly, the practice of employing popular musicians to enhance the music of ecclesial worship is not unique to the nineteenth and twentieth century North American context.

The appeal of music in ushering in the faithful and curious to the revivals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is undeniable; would the force of Torrey, Chapman, Sunday, and Moody’s sermons have been the same without Alexander, Rodeheaver, Bliss, and Sankey? This practice of coupling well-known musicians with popular preachers was so

<sup>10</sup>For example, see David W. Music, *Music and Worship: The Emerging Experiences of Baptists* (Atlanta, GA: Baptist Heritage Society, 2008); David Warren Steel and Richard H. Hulan, *The Makers of the Sacred Harp, Music in American Life* (Urbana [Ill.]: University of Illinois Press, 2010); David W. Music and Paul Westermeyer, *Church Music in the United States: 1760-1901* (Fenton [Missouri]: MorningStar Music Publishers, 2014).

<sup>11</sup>Lester Ruth, “Lex Agendi, Lex Orandi: Toward an Understanding of Seeker Services as a New Kind of Liturgy,” *Worship* 70, no. 5 (September 1996): 386–405.

<sup>12</sup>Donald P Hustad, “Baptist Worship Forms: Uniting the Charleston and Sandy Creek Traditions,” *Review & Expositor* 85, no. 1 (1988): 31–42. Hustad notes that the Sandy Creek Tradition dates back further than the revivals I mention here, but it would be a mistake to conclude that camp meeting services descend directly from Sandy Creek Baptists; I am not determining lineage but rather noting similarity for the sake of description.

successful that, as the revivals of the early twentieth century diminished in force and frequency following the second world war (Billy Graham notwithstanding), it was institutionalized in many evangelical churches in the United States (what James F. White called the “Frontier Tradition”<sup>13</sup>). This process was not unidirectional; it should be noted that Alexander, Rodeheaver, Bliss, and Sankey would not be nearly as well known if not for their partnerships with Torrey, Chapman, Sunday and Moody.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, the perceived value of having a recognizable persona involved in any leadership capacity at a church was undeniable, and explicitly so regarding music.

### TECHNOLOGICAL RELIANCE

An important component of the Celebrity Model is modern technology. The communicative power and popularity of internet-based social media and image/video sharing sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, Livestream, and YouTube—together with audio streaming sites such as Spotify, Pandora, Amazon Music, iTunes Radio, Band Camp, and a host of others—facilitated an explosion of far-reaching dissemination for both famous worship leaders and the artifacts they produced/were associated with. This nearly comprehensive dissemination was in large part facilitated by the introduction of IMAG (Image MAGnification) in the late 1990s in evangelical churches in North America.<sup>15</sup> Now the congregation and those watching at home (via television, YouTube, or Livestream) could see the worship leader; he or she was no longer just a name but was also a recognizable face and personality.

### CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP MUSIC AND THE CHRISTIAN MUSIC INDUSTRY

Beginning in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the development of popular forms of musical worship has had a profound impact on congregational singing in North America. While the term Praise and Worship has been used in Latter Rain Pentecostal circles since at least the 1950s (and likely earlier),<sup>16</sup> the musical form most often historically associated with it emerged in Calvary Chapel, Costa Mesa, in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>17</sup> This nascent Praise and

<sup>13</sup>James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 146.

<sup>14</sup>Nekola, “Negotiating the Tensions of U.S. Worship Music in the Marketplace,” 517.

<sup>15</sup>Lim Swee Hong and Lester Ruth, *Lovin’ on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2017), 42–51, esp. 51. IMAG is an audiovisual technology that projects close-up images of the performers (worship leaders) on screens during musical worship so that the congregation can see details of the performance they might not see without such aid. It can further be used to live stream the worship service for those who cannot attend but are watching online.

<sup>16</sup>Lester Ruth, “Enthroned Upon the Praises: The Sacramentalizing of Praise in the Historical Origins of Contemporary Worship,” in *Touching Hearts, Encountering God* (Congregational Christian Music Conference, Rippon College, Cuddesdon, Oxford, 2017).

<sup>17</sup>Lim and Ruth, , 60–63; Charles E Fromm, “Textual Communities and New Song in the Multimedia Age: The Routinization of Charisma in the

Worship bore a striking musical resemblance to the urban folk music that was associated with the counterculture of the 1960s, and often quoted scripture at length for lyrics. By the 1970s, genres in Christian popular music had expanded to include rock and pop styles of music for white evangelical churches, and Swee Hong Lim and Lester Ruth have argued for “Contemporary Worship Music” as an umbrella term for the varied forms of musical worship that fall beyond the bounds of traditional sacred repertory.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, record labels sprang up to distribute the new music, and while historically it is widely accepted that Praise and Worship originated in the church, scores of other Christian-themed musical artifacts began to be produced that were not explicitly intended for congregational use—either thematically or musically. As this development occurred, a split emerged in the nascent Christian recording industry between “praise songs” (pieces meant for congregational singing whose subject was praising God directly) and “message songs” (pieces meant for a broader audience that were non-congregational and whose subject was temporal, i.e., conversion or sanctification). Accordingly, record companies such as Maranatha! Music (M!M), Hosanna! Music (H!M), and Integrity Music focused on recording and distributing artifacts for congregational use. Other companies, such as Word, Benson, and Sparrow (and their various sub-labels such as Myrrh, Star Song, etc.), focused on recording and distributing artifacts that were non-congregational “message” songs.<sup>19</sup> As such, Christian popular music was divided between Contemporary Worship Music (CWM) and Contemporary Christian Music (CCM), with CWM being largely produced and distributed by companies such as M!M, H!M, and Integrity Music and CCM largely being produced and distributed by companies such as Word, Benson, and Sparrow.<sup>20</sup>

By the late 1980s and 1990s, the CCM side of the Christian music industry had its first platinum selling artist (Amy Grant), and attracted the attention of multinational record companies such as Capitol, EMI, A&M, Geffen, Universal, and Sony. Grant’s *Age to Age*<sup>21</sup> prompted execs at A&M to distribute her music to the general market. Within a decade the CCM side of the Christian music industry had been

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 Jesus Movement” (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2006), 186; Monique M. Ingalls, Anna E. Nekola, and Andrew Theodore Mall, “Christian Popular Music, USA,” *The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), <http://www.hymnology.co.uk/c/christian-popular-music,-usa?q=christian%20popular%20music%20USA>.

<sup>18</sup>Lim and Ruth, 6–12.

<sup>19</sup>Charles E. Fromm, “Textual Communities and New Song in the Multimedia Age: The Routinization of Charisma in the Jesus Movement” (Fuller Theological Seminary, 2006), 73–74; Lim and Ruth, 63–65. This split was to prove short lived, however, as the “British Invasion” (discussed below) indicates. There are, of course, exceptions to this division, as certainly there were songs that were intended for entertainment or outreach that found their way into congregational use, and vice versa.

<sup>20</sup>Monique M. Ingalls, Anna E. Nekola, and Andrew Theodore Mall, “Christian Popular Music, USA,” *The Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), <http://www.hymnology.co.uk/c/christian-popular-music,-usa?q=christian%20popular%20music%20USA>.

<sup>21</sup>1982, certified platinum in 1985, [https://www.riaa.com/gold-platinum/?tab\\_active=default-award&se=Amy+Grant#search\\_section](https://www.riaa.com/gold-platinum/?tab_active=default-award&se=Amy+Grant#search_section), accessed 03/12/18

purchased by multinational music companies.<sup>22</sup> While the resulting growth in sales for Christian artists was undeniable, the change also brought charges of insincerity on the part of the artists and record execs: what did “Christian” mean in the context of the recording industry? Was it a marketing designation, or a marker of faith?

## THE BRITISH INVASION

The division between CWM and CCM began to be bridged in the late 1990s in response to the “British Invasion.” Monique Ingalls chronicles the migration of what came to be known as Modern Worship from “new paradigm” churches in the UK to evangelical congregations in the US.<sup>23</sup> She notes that Modern Worship was marketed in the U. S. at the behest of certain Nashville based industry executives, notably Fred Heumann and Steve Rice.

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Sonically, the Modern Worship of the British Invasion was distinctly edgier than CCM’s middle of the road and Praise and Worship’s (Hillsong Worship, Graham Kendrick, Geoff Bullock, etc.) soundscapes; loudly distorted guitars featuring effects such as delay (the mechanical replication of a note or sound that can be repeated without the performer playing the note again – an echo) and reverb (slight reverberations of a note or pitch that produce a dreamlike quality; imagine playing a guitar in a large, empty auditorium), strained vocal delivery, aggressive drumming and rhythm patterns, and production values similar to those used by Radiohead and U2. In addition to the guitars, synthesizers and electric keyboards feature prominently in this musical style.<sup>24</sup> As such, Modern Worship should be understood as a subset of Contemporary Worship Music that is sonorously and formally distinct from Praise and Worship; while P&W often utilized strophic and occasionally simple bar forms, Modern Worship often employs more developed formal characteristics of what I call the “pop

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<sup>22</sup>Ingalls, “Transnational Connections, Musical Meaning, and the 1990s ‘British Invasion’ of North American Evangelical Worship Music”; Nekola, “Negotiating the Tensions of U.S. Worship Music in the Marketplace.” It can be said that the relative success of Christian Contemporary Music helped pave the way for this; however, theirs was still a (marketing) model based on touring.

<sup>23</sup>Ingalls, “Transnational Connections, Musical Meaning, and the 1990s ‘British Invasion’ of North American Evangelical Worship Music,” 429–30; C.f., Ingalls, Nekola, and Mall, “Christian Popular Music, USA.”

<sup>24</sup>Ingalls, “Transnational Connections, Musical Meaning, and the 1990s ‘British Invasion’ of North American Evangelical Worship Music”; Ingalls, Nekola, and Mall, “Christian Popular Music, USA”; Nekola, “Negotiating the Tensions of U.S. Worship Music in the Marketplace,” 520. It may be helpful to imagine the various terms associated with these developments in a nested fashion: Christian Popular Music (CPM) is an overall umbrella term with Contemporary Worship Music (CWM) and Contemporary Christian Music comprising the two main subsets of CPM. Within the category of CWM, Praise and Worship is the older, more urban folk based musical form, and Modern Worship is the more rock and modern pop based musical form.



sonata;” A, or “exposition,” section (Intro, Verse, Chorus) often repeated twice (the repeat of the introduction is often called a “turn around” by pop musicians) followed by a B, or “development,” section (Bridge, often a distinct melody line and harmonic structure that occasionally exhibits the characteristics of a key change from tonic to either a dominant function or relative minor key, although such a change may not actually be present), and an A’ or “recapitulation” that returns to the A section while incorporating several of the timbral elements of the development.

These musical, ecclesial, technological, and cultural strands converged to form the basis for the Celebrity Model of music ministry in the late 1990s and early 2000s. As I will show below, the basis for the Celebrity Model, the celebrity worship leader, was a response to charges of “inauthenticity” on the part of Christian record execs in Nashville, and consequently the concept of authenticity was to be the crucial criterion of the Celebrity Model.

## Double Authenticity and the Process of “Sacredization”

### DOUBLE AUTHENTICITY

Recognizing the marketability of Modern Worship music, recording executives signed acts and song leaders such as Delirious? and Matt Redman to recording and distribution contracts, and the artifacts resulting from the fulfillment of these contracts were marketed and distributed in the U. S. with great success in the established Christian music market. As Ingalls notes, CCM had been marketed as wholesome, light pop entertainment music. However, the Christian music industry had been subject to critiques of inauthenticity and disunity; indeed, the resounding refrain of Ingalls’s interlocutors is the authenticity with which Modern Worship leaders performed.<sup>25</sup>

Authenticity has been variously described as synonymous with sincerity, or conviction, or even integrity.<sup>26</sup> Yet how authenticity is demonstrated and/or qualified remains elusive; how can I *know* a person is being authentic, and to what? On one hand, authenticity could mean “the real McCoy,” or the genuine artifact. On another, it could mean deeply convicted. For Ingalls’s interlocutors, authenticity seems to mean both, simultaneously—what I wish to call *double authenticity*. The double authenticity of Modern Worship leaders was indicated first by their apparent conviction and faithfulness to their religious confession by what Ingalls calls “authenticating gestures.”<sup>27</sup> This faithfulness in turn symbolized an identity

<sup>25</sup>Ingalls, “Transnational Connections, Musical Meaning, and the 1990s ‘British Invasion’ of North American Evangelical Worship Music,” 432–33.

<sup>26</sup>Charles Taylor has argued that we are currently in an “Age of Authenticity,” where the need to discover one’s true self and then live harmoniously with that true self has become an ethical orientation—“the ethics of authenticity.” See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 473–504, for a discussion of this.

<sup>27</sup>Monique Marie Ingalls, “Awesome in This Place: Sound, Space, and Identity in Contemporary North American Evangelical Worship” (University of Pennsylvania, 2008), <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.baylor.edu/docview/304494371/abstract/667024D74C684480PQ/3>.

centered on the tenets of their faith; they were the “real McCoy,” the genuine artifact. In her discussion on Allan F. Moore’s treatment of authenticity, Ingalls notes that the function of authentication for popular musicians is not to authenticate an object, but to authenticate *themselves*. Second, part of what indicated this status as “genuine artifact” was the reality of their original (authentic) musical compositions; they were “the real deal” in that they were perceptively faithful Christians who composed their own, enjoyable, music.

The success of the British Invasion in the U. S. should not be understated. Indeed, the appeal of the new music revitalized the Christian Music Industry in the 1990s and early 2000s, boosting sales and creating a demand for more Modern Worship.<sup>28</sup> This demand in turn gave rise a new generation of Christian recording musicians: Modern Worship Leaders. Distinct from the use of the term “worship leaders” in Pentecostal and Charismatic circles in the 1980s<sup>29</sup> by virtue of its use as a marketing designation that infers the earlier use, the Modern Worship leader quickly became the most successful sort of CCM artist. During the early 2000s, several dozen new Modern Worship leaders were “discovered,” and many established CCM artists, such as Michael W. Smith, reinvented themselves as “worship leaders,” seeing a resurgence in their careers; Smith’s *Worship*, released in 2001, was certified Platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) in 2002, and 2x Multi-Platinum in 2010 – his only record to do so.<sup>30</sup> Tellingly, Smith’s 1992 release *Change Your World* was his only album to be certified Platinum prior to *Worship*, reaching that milestone in 1997. Two of his other albums reached Platinum sales status after *Worship*, with 1995’s *I’ll Lead You Home* and 1990’s *Go West Young Man* being certified platinum in 2004.<sup>31</sup>

One of the most remarkable features of the marketing strategies employed by U. S. executives to reach consumers with Modern Worship music derived from the claim of authenticity; or perhaps it is better to say that authenticity was indicated by a certain criterion: Worship leaders needed to be “grounded in a local church.”<sup>32</sup> In order to demonstrate that this new music was “authentic” (in this case, written for the purpose of providing a specific congregation with a worship repertory), the artist had to be employed (either monetarily or on a volunteer basis) in a specific congregation; and that their songs were not for entertainment purposes, but had a

<sup>28</sup>Ingalls, “Transnational Connections, Musical Meaning, and the 1990s ‘British Invasion’ of North American Evangelical Worship Music,” 442.

<sup>29</sup>See Nelson Cowan, “Lay-Prophet-Priest: The Not-So-Fledgling ‘Office’ of the Worship Leader,” *Liturgy* 32, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 24–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2016.1229443> for a history of the term “worship leader.”

<sup>30</sup>“Gold and Platinum,” RIAA, accessed March 27, 2018, [https://www.riaa.com/gold-platinum/?tab\\_active=default-award&ar=MICHAEL+W.+SMITH&ti=WORSHIP](https://www.riaa.com/gold-platinum/?tab_active=default-award&ar=MICHAEL+W.+SMITH&ti=WORSHIP)

<sup>31</sup>Nekola, “Negotiating the Tensions of U.S. Worship Music in the Marketplace,” 520; cf. “Gold & Platinum,” RIAA, accessed March 27, 2018, <https://www.riaa.com/gold-platinum/>; [https://www.riaa.com/gold-platinum/?tab\\_active=default-award&ar=MICHAEL+W.+SMITH&ti=I%27LL+LEAD+YOU+HOME](https://www.riaa.com/gold-platinum/?tab_active=default-award&ar=MICHAEL+W.+SMITH&ti=I%27LL+LEAD+YOU+HOME).

<sup>32</sup>Mike Dodson, bassist for The David Crowder Band, interview with author, March 1, 2017, for example.

specifically sacred function. This, in turn, “proved” that the worship leader was not merely an entertainer or performer, and that they were not engaged in this activity merely to accumulate wealth or power, but were instead intent on furthering the cause of the gospel.

This criterion of “grounding” had ramifications that moved in a multidirectional manner: in one direction, it foregrounded the necessity of the “local church” for aspiring Christian musicians; if you want to be successful in the Christian Music Industry you needed to be committed to a particular congregation in order to fulfill the criterion of authenticity that was so crucial to the success of the marketing model. A careful, if cynical, observer will also see another benefit in this insistence on groundedness: a readymade grassroots fanbase, or an affinity market that would guarantee an initial influx of revenue for the artifact being sold. To say it plainly, if you are the (ostensibly modern) worship leader at a large church, a recording executive is going to be more likely to distribute your album because it can be reasonably assumed that your congregation will buy it, and then likely tell their friends to buy it as well. If the album has some appeal to these initial consumers, then “word of mouth” marketing can begin to have some effect, and return on investment can be achieved much more quickly. I do not bring this up to denigrate the recording industry, nor to poke holes in claims to sincerity, but rather to point out that this is simply the way the world works, and that the pragmatism that dominates any commercial endeavor necessitates it; strategic marketing is not evil. It can, however, have implications that are unforeseen.

A second direction in which this criterion impelled motion was outwards *from* the local churches that encountered this marketing strategy. Whereas the Christian music industry executives’ insistence on grounding in the local church to satisfy one aspect of the criteria of double authenticity sent many aspiring musicians *into* the local church, this movement similarly compelled church leaders to recognize the reach and appeal of these Modern Worship leaders. Church leaders who witnessed the success of Modern Worship leaders such as Sonic Flood, and especially David Crowder (University Baptist Church in Waco, TX) or Chris Tomlin (Passion Conference, Passion City Church in Atlanta, GA) sought to bring such a person onto their ministerial staff in much the same manner as Moody and Sunday partnered with Sankey and Rodeheaver during the evangelical revivals of the previous century. However, in contrast to those revivalists, these worship leaders who wrote and recorded their own music were emphatically *localized*; if they did tour, it was promoted as an unusual activity. Moreover, while Sankey and Rodeheaver ostensibly wrote songs for their respective publishing houses and denominations, worship leaders ostensibly wrote songs for their immediate congregation. As more and more church leaders recognized the numerical growth of churches who housed a successful Modern Worship leader, the desire to grow similarly caused many churches to seek out successful, or at least potentially successful, worship leaders to energize their churches.<sup>33</sup> As

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<sup>33</sup>These desires were amplified by popular research surveys that showed declining church attendance and increasing irrelevance of church activities for many Americans. For example, a Gallup poll released in 1996 showed

these activities increased, a model for successful music ministry was established: the Celebrity Model.

## SONIC “SACREDITY”

**T**he Celebrity Model of music ministry is identified by many of the same criteria that identify the British Invasion of Modern Worship music, yet their orientation is in the opposite direction: while record executives mandated that worship leaders be grounded in a local church, local churches, in turn, sought worship leaders who either had experience with the recording industry or had the potential to do so. As the demand far outpaced the supply—there were more churches looking for an authentic celebrity worship leader than there were celebrity worship leaders—the latter option was most often the case. In this way, the inflected aspect of the criteria of double authenticity is the production of culturally important musical artifacts, more so than by continuing commitment to a local congregation, as that is in many respects assumed. Indeed, the number of Modern Worship churches encouraging their worship leaders to write and record original music for use in the congregation (and often financing the effort) has exploded since the early 2000s, with churches such as Hillsong, Jesus Culture, and Bethel emerging as publishing and recording companies whose musical artifacts have populated the Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) charts in the past decade.<sup>34</sup> Their success has inspired other churches, and it has now become common practice for Modern Worship churches to record and distribute their own musical recordings. For example, MosaicLA in Los Angeles, Rock Harbor Fellowship in Orange County, California, Anchor Fellowship in Nashville, Tennessee, Austin Stone in Austin, Texas, The Rock in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Harris Creek in Waco, Texas, and countless others, have recorded and distributed their own modern worship recordings and music ministry material for purchase and/or congregational use. These churches regularly number their attendance in the thousands, and have considerable influence in their respective spheres of ecclesial life and ministry.

This observation reveals a striking shift in theological thinking about commercially produced artifacts for some U. S. protestant Christians. During the “worship wars” of the 1980s, 90s, and early 00s, a prevailing refrain against the use of Contemporary Worship Music in churches was its commerciality.<sup>35</sup> Music that was produced for commercial

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that regular American church attendance dropped to 38% from 43% in 1995. Despite the anomalous nature of this dip (attendance climbed to 43% by 1999), the perception that church attendance was declining remained strong. Gallup, Inc, “A Look at Americans and Religion Today,” [Gallup.com](http://www.gallup.com/poll/11089/Look-Americans-Religion-Today.aspx), accessed March 23, 2017, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/11089/Look-Americans-Religion-Today.aspx>.

<sup>34</sup>It should be noted that these companies are all distributed by Capitol Christian EMI in the USA.

<sup>35</sup>See Terry W. York, *America’s Worship Wars* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999); Anna E. Nekola, “Between This World and the Next: The Musical ‘Worship Wars’ and Evangelical Ideology in the United States, 1960-2005” (Ph.D. diss., The University of Wisconsin - Madison, 2009), <http://search.proquest.com/docview/305033619/abstract/C2E7DD86A0B14C38PQ/1>, for example.

purposes was understood as inherently *secular*, and therefore unworthy of consideration for corporate worship. Austin Lovelace and William Rice, for instance (writing during the emergence of Praise and Worship music), argued that there was a definite sacred repertory that was in contradistinction to commercially produced music.<sup>36</sup> A few years later, Erik Routley argued that the incorporation of commercially produced music into the sacred repertory of the church would result in a diminishment of the moral fiber of the congregation.<sup>37</sup> However, as we are beginning to see, the line between secular and sacred artifacts is no longer neatly delineated by criteria of commercial production. Furthermore, the music Lovelace and Rice and Routley advocated as sacred was also commercially produced and distributed; hymnals and songbooks were strong sources of revenue, and each of the major denominations of the twentieth century had its own publishing house. It can be argued that their insistence on the secularity of commercially produced music was because the beneficiaries of the revenue generated were secular (or non-ecclesial) institutions, but this, too, is no longer the case. While it is true that the major Christian record labels based in Nashville are owned by secular multinational corporations, the executives who served as Ingalls's interlocutors are committed Christians; and if this point proves insufficient, consider that Hillsong, Jesus Culture, Bethel, and the other churches mentioned above are the primary recipients of the revenue generated by the sales of their musical artifacts. Commerciality is no longer synonymous with secularity.<sup>38</sup>

Theologically, this shift is perhaps best understood as a response to popular works such as Andy Crouch's 2008 book *Culture Making*, wherein he argues that Christians are called by God to take a leading position in the generation of what he terms "culture." Drawing on a Reformed understanding of H. Richard Niebuhr's widely disseminated *Christ and Culture* typology, Crouch argues that culture is most profoundly *transformed* by the production of cultural artifacts; in contradistinction to theorists who engage culture conceptually ("the culture concept"), Crouch locates "culture" as the collection of tangible goods that humans create coterminous with the functions those artifacts perform.<sup>39</sup> As such, the process by which Crouch advocates for the transformation of "culture" is, on the one hand, through the creation of new, faithful, cultural goods such as music and plastic arts, food, technology, and social infrastructure, and on the other hand, through the cultivation of existing cultural artifacts that can be faithfully marshalled in the service of the gospel.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup>Austin C. Lovelace and William C. Rice, *Music and Worship in the Church*, Rev. & Enl. ed (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976), 13ff; Cf. Nekola, "Between This World and the next." It should be noted that Lovelace and Rice seem to connect "secular" music with commercial recording processes as much as they do with style and genre (Erik Routley does similarly in *Church Music and the Christian Faith*).

<sup>37</sup>Erik Routley, *Church Music and the Christian Faith* (Carol Stream, Ill: Agape, 1978), 84-113, esp. 91.

<sup>38</sup>Nekola, "Negotiating the Tensions of U.S. Worship Music in the Marketplace," 514.

<sup>39</sup>Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 65ff.

<sup>40</sup>Crouch, 65.

This rather simplistic narrative is helpfully thickened by Anna Nekola's identification of the interrelationship of objects and identity via the ideology of "lifestyle."<sup>41</sup> Nekola describes the negotiation of the conflicting claims made by American evangelicals over the relative value of the "commodification of worship" music by highlighting the connections between musical worship and the value of consumption in conservative evangelicalism through the lens of "lifestyle marketing."<sup>42</sup> Tracing the emergence of this line of thinking in evangelical Christianity to the revivalist D. L. Moody's coupling of the gospel message with an individualistic brand of capitalism, she argues that fundamental to the notion of lifestyle is the ability of consumers to possess objects that symbolically identify themselves with a particular ideology. This process of possessing goods in order to configure a religious identity necessitates the creation of cultural goods intended for this particular sort of consumption.<sup>43</sup>

The emergence of "religious lifestyle branding" in evangelical Christianity has been observed and documented by the authors of Lynn Schofield Clark's 2007 edited volume *Religion, Media, and the Marketplace*. In her introduction, Clark highlights the success of "fashion Bibles" published by Zondervan, Thomas Nelson, and Lifeway in the 1990s to illustrate how religious artifacts have simultaneously become a means of revenue generation, on one hand, and authentic confirmation of faith on the other.<sup>44</sup> This confirmation of faith through consumption of tangible goods is both individual and visibly communal; these religiously themed consumer objects serve to mark an individual as a member of a certain religious group while also differentiating that individual from others. While on the surface this practice may seem counterintuitive, careful reflection reveals that despite claims of overt individualism from some who might agree with Lovelace, Rice, and Routley, Clark contends that this reality is much more coherent. Just as lifestyle branding has enabled individuated means of authenticating religious commitments, the items produced for these purposes have themselves been "marshalled for . . . ends in ways the original producers never intended, thus making them less a distraction from faith and more an accomplice in a larger . . . project."<sup>45</sup> In this way, consumer items, while ostensibly still threatening to become objects of devotion themselves, most often serve as tangible means of identifying *with* a particular set of religious commitments and adherents to those commitments.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>41</sup>Nekola, "Negotiating the Tensions of U.S. Worship Music in the Marketplace," 524-25.

<sup>42</sup>Nekola, 524-25.

<sup>43</sup>For further discussion on this form of religious commitment, see Taylor, *Entertainment Theology*, "Shopping For God: Commodifying Faith," 96 ff.

<sup>44</sup>Clark, "Identity, Belonging, and Religious Lifestyle Branding (Fashion Bibles, Bhangra Parties, and Muslim Pop)," 5-7.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 7, elapses in place of the term "political." Clark is here using "political" in a broad sense, and not particularly to apply to a partisan agenda as is common in the US. Instead, she means by the term something akin to *public declarations of value, identity, and commitments*. I have omitted it in the quote for the purpose of clarity, both towards Clark's thought and how I am using it.

<sup>46</sup>This pattern is neither new nor novel. Consider, for example, the use of relics during the middle ages, or the iconography of the Eastern Church.

This identification with a certain group or ideology is equally true of music as of “fashion Bibles.” Quoting Michael W. Smith, Nekola suggests that there is a lifestyle that is configured around the consumption of Modern Worship music: “I so believe that worship is a lifestyle and for me it encompasses everything that I do.”<sup>47</sup> In order for worship to be a lifestyle, it cannot be confined to the sanctuary, but instead must permeate the whole of life. If this lifestyle is to include music, then possessing musical artifacts such as MP3s and digital audio files is necessary, and their production and distribution is likewise necessary.

When Nekola’s and Crouch’s suggestions are considered in conversation with Ingalls’s suggestions about the virtue of authenticity through the process of Clark’s authenticating items, a process of convergence and cohesion begins to emerge, a process I would like to call “sacredization.” Similar to terms such as “sacralization,” yet distinct in its application, sacredization refers to the double authentication process by which commercial items are made sacred through possession and consumption by individuals who wish to self-identify with a religious group. The process of sacredization stands at the heart of the Celebrity Model’s success, as in order for the members of the congregation to both belong and be transformed in the process of belonging through possession and consumption, the worship leader must in turn authenticate him or herself through the production of viable artifacts for religious consumption in such a way that the “sacredity,” or successful completion of sacredization, of the artifact may be readily identified. In this way, the model aspires to be self-sustaining, fulfilling a multifaceted demand for goods while simultaneously marshalling those goods into the service of the gospel.

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<sup>47</sup>Nekola, “Negotiating the Tensions of U.S. Worship Music in the Marketplace,” 525.

## Conclusion

I have argued that a new model for music ministry has emerged in the previous decade and a half, and that this model should be called the Celebrity Model. It emerged from the convergence of ecclesial, cultural, and technological strands in the Christian music industry in the late 1990s, and the philosophical impetus for the success of this industry-based and -perpetuated model is the criterion of authenticity that is dually constructed on the twin poles of context (“grounded in a local church”) and content (“commercially produced artifacts”). This “double authenticity” in turn finds its impetus in the consumer-driven culture of North America, and especially in evangelical circles where the need to identify religiously—both individually and communally—impels the purchase and consumption of the authenticated artifacts that are distributed for such purposes.

Yet much remains to be said: What about churches who do not have a celebrity Modern Worship leader, but wish to replicate that success? Does this model apply to them as well? Certainly not all churches who use Modern Worship music have a worship leader with a recording contract or distribution deal. Can they also practice this model? I contend that they can through the process of replication, and will explain how this is so in an article taking the place of my Hymn Performance column for the Summer 2018 issue of *THE HYMN*. I will describe how the model relates to the values I have identified in this article, examine how the prevalence of technology facilitates this practice, and offer some suggestions for effective use of the Celebrity Model. ❤️

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Nathan Myrick is a PhD Candidate in Church Music at Baylor University. He works on the intersection of music, ethics, and theology in lived religion.

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