

Stairway to Heaven or Highway to Hell?:  
The Potential Missiological Efficacy of Liturgical Rock Music in Canada

by

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## Dedication

This one goes out to all the overlooked freaks and geeks, the kinds of wild souls who have always been the ripest and most dangerously receptive recipients of the Gospel.

## Abstract

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Music is a sacred language that facilitates divine encounter. The church has developed a unique musical language which is distinct from other contemporary genres. This thesis explores the efficacy of liturgies that use vernacular, functional, and communal forms to fulfill a missiology of radical welcome. Living in the midst of a consumer-driven environment, the church can employ popular forms to facilitate life-changing encounters with the living God, but it also must wrestle with a populace who has been raised to believe that relationality is expressed transactionally. Contemporary rock artists have already been authentically grappling with this reality for decades, making their music an ideal liturgical choice to facilitate contemporary peoples' encounter with the paschal mystery which is the eternal rhythmic heart-beat of Christ's living Body.

March 31, 2021.

## Acknowledgements

This essay is one of the missing puzzle pieces I found under the couch of my young adult skepticism regarding the church and its eternal hypocrisy. In the midst of the verses of modern popular disdain for institutions, I have found inspirational choruses of God's grace in the congregations of the churches I have served in ordained ministry. I would like to acknowledge the courage of the United Church of Canada congregations of Murray River, Brookfield, and Middle Stewiacke for being bold enough to embrace a move toward vernacular music in their liturgies, and for any who have shared their surprise in the movement of the Spirit through contemporary forms in sacred spaces. These congregations emboldened me to explore what it is about music that is so powerful both in liturgies and contemporary culture. I would also like to thank Rev. Dr. Robert Fennell for his wisdom and guidance as my thesis advisor, and Dr. David Deane for encouraging me for over a decade to believe that this topic could be a thesis. Most important, I am grateful to my wife for persistently goading me to pursue academics even when feeling overwhelmed by the demands of a life in service of the church. Without the relentless support of all these faithful people, this work could have never happened.

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## Chapter 1: Come as You Are

Yes, there are two paths you can go by, but in the long run

There's still time to change the road you're on

Led Zeppelin, "Stairway to Heaven," from *Led Zeppelin IV*, 1971

### *Introduction*

As the joke goes, the fact that there is a highway to hell and only a stairway to heaven says a lot about the anticipated traffic.<sup>1</sup> The mission of the church, through the redemptive power of Jesus the Christ, is to stand as witness to Creation of the opportunity to take the narrow path to achieve not only otherworldly rewards, but to orient our lives toward our purpose, which Christians believe is following the Way of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> The church is not immune to the same challenges that individuals face in choosing the broad, fast highway over the narrow, arduous stairway. This thesis provides evidence of how the church's resistance to theomusicological reform has contributed to its missiological inefficacy in Canada.

How each denomination and congregation chooses to live out its missiology varies. This thesis is interested particularly in addressing churches who claim a missiology of radical welcome through public worship. Radical welcome is a way of embodying the Great Commission of Christ to the church to "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

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<sup>1</sup> This joke has been attributed to Darynda Jones, Karen Marle Moning, and Bill Murray.

<sup>2</sup> Mt 7:13-14.

and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”<sup>3</sup> As worship is the ecclesial expression most recognizable to the average Canadian, it is an ideal place for a congregation’s missiology of radical welcome to be expressed.

One example of a denomination that explicitly claims a missiology of radical welcome is the United Church of Canada [UCC]. Evidence of this is everywhere on the church’s website. The UCC has publicly declared:

- United Church faith communities welcome people from all backgrounds and orientations.<sup>4</sup>
- Respectful of the religious practice of all people of goodwill, we are a welcoming church that is challenged to ongoing renewal.<sup>5</sup>
- Jesus welcomed everyone, whether they were poor, rich, or just getting by; ill or healthy; self-made or educated; popular or a loner; secure or full of doubts.<sup>6</sup>
- The United Church prides itself on being open and welcoming as Jesus was, regardless of age, race, class, gender, orientation, or physical ability.<sup>7</sup>
- Today, we are challenged by our intercultural vision to go beyond inclusion to a *radical welcoming*. This vision calls us to renew the ways we worship, live, and work together, with the leadership of people who may previously have been on the margins.<sup>8</sup>
- Our faithful and lively congregations are key witnesses to God's inclusive love in the world.<sup>9</sup>
- Grateful for God’s loving action, we cannot keep from singing.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Mt 28:19-20a, New International Version [NIV].

<sup>4</sup> “Welcome to the United Church of Canada,” The United Church of Canada, 2019, accessed April 9, 2019, <https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/welcome-united-church-canada>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> “Relationship and Inclusion,” The United Church of Canada, 2019, accessed April 9, 2019, <https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/welcome-united-church-canada/relationship-and-inclusion>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., italics added for emphasis.

<sup>9</sup> “Strengthening Congregations,” The United Church of Canada, 2019, accessed April 9, 2019, <https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/being-community/strengthening-congregations>

<sup>10</sup> “A Song of Faith: A Statement of Faith of The United Church of Canada,” The United Church of Canada, 2006, <https://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/resources/song-of-faith.docx>

Although the UCC proclaims radical welcome, it, like all other mainline Christian denominations, has experienced significant decline in the midst of a culture which has remained spiritually curious.<sup>11</sup> Despite this decline, the mission of the church remains to live out these stated values and to share them with those who are seeking to take the ramp off the highway and climb the good stairway. Whenever the term ‘church’ is used in the context of this thesis, it should be interpreted through the lens of a church which aspires to the kind of missiology of radical welcome as expressed by the UCC, and also to the historical context from which this kind of missiology arises.

Worship is the central expression of the vast majority of communities of faith in the church. The UCC’s Articles of Faith state that the purpose of the church is “for the public worship of God, for the administration of the sacraments, for the upbuilding of the saints, and for the universal propagation of the Gospel.”<sup>12</sup> Even in these vastly changing times, and in light of the fact that the church is breaking out of traditional forms in many exciting ways, most communities of faith are still largely defined by their weekly worship service. This thesis makes the assumption that worship will continue to be a defining characteristic of church life.

Music is a central element of worship in most churches and a key component of being human throughout history. This thesis will explore how music is a powerful missional and liturgical tool for living out radical welcome. This thesis argues that being

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<sup>11</sup> Ross Bartlett, “1990-2003: The Church into the New Millennium,” in *The United Church of Canada: A History*, ed. Don Schweitzer (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University, 2012), 164; Paul Bramadat, “Beyond Christian Canada: Religion and Ethnicity in a Multi-Cultural Society,” in *Religion and Ethnicity in Canada*, eds. Paul Bramadat and David Seljak (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto, 2009), 3-4.

<sup>12</sup> “Twenty Articles of Doctrine,” The United Church of Canada, 2019, accessed April 19, 2019, <https://www.united-church.ca/community-faith/welcome-united-church-canada/twenty-articles-doctrine-1925>, Article XV.



radically welcoming means translating and transmitting the Gospel for a contemporary people who have not heard it in a language they can understand.<sup>13</sup> Music's ability to communicate spiritual and religious ideas means that the church needs to use it wisely. This thesis will show that the church's inability to engage people using a musical language with which they can engage is a significant barrier to missiological efficacy.

Rock is used as an example of popular music, partly because it is the music of choice of the writer, and partly because it has been the most popular music genre of the past 50 years.<sup>14</sup> However, in the six years since beginning this thesis, the popular music landscape has changed dramatically. Pop and rap music have been the genres of choice since 2016.<sup>15</sup> Although rock has certain elements which make it particularly effective as a liturgical choice, this essay does not mean to limit the use of other genres. Popular contemporary music differs from much of the music being used in worship. This thesis seeks to challenge the church to review its theomusicology in light of its missiology.

The wide spectrum of people who do not attend church cannot be lumped into one singular category. In this thesis, the term 'unchurched' will be used to describe persons with Christian ancestors who currently have no religious affiliation either due to having never attended church or having left the church for an extended period of time due to lack of interest. Those with a Sunday school theological level or less who chose at a young age to disengage from the church are included in this definition of unchurched. However,

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<sup>13</sup> Worship in one's own language for the benefit of their understanding is a fundamental part of the Reformation.

<sup>14</sup> Jack Beckwith, "The Evolution of Music Genre Popularity," *The Data Face*, September 7, 2016, accessed April 12, 2019, <http://thedataface.com/2016/09/culture/genre-lifecycles>

<sup>15</sup> "The Top Songs, Artists, Playlists, and Podcasts of 2018," Spotify, December 4, 2018, accessed April 11, 2019, <https://newsroom.spotify.com/2018-12-04/the-top-songs-artists-playlists-and-podcasts-of-2018/>

the term ‘unchurched’ as used here specifically does *not* include people who consider themselves practicing Christians but do not regularly attend church worship services.

This thesis considers the musical language of the unchurched. When the term ‘rock’ or ‘rock music’ is used, it refers to the popular electric guitar-, bass-, and drum-driven music produced primarily in Western Europe, North America, and English-speaking Oceania. The term ‘contemporary music’ encompasses a wide variety of genres and styles popular in Canada marketed toward Christians and otherwise. The term ‘traditional’ in the scope of this study is used very broadly; when discussing hymnody, it refers generally to hymns written before 1950 specifically for use in Christian worship. The thesis also makes reference to Christian Contemporary Music [CCM], which encompasses a variety of identifiable subgenres including praise choruses and original contemporary rock selections written specifically for a Christian audience.<sup>16</sup> A basic understanding of the popular North American contemporary music scene over the past 50 years is critical to understanding this thesis.

In the first chapter, the framework for the relationship between the church and contemporary Canadian culture will be explored. In the second, a historical theomusicology will be presented to show how rock music fits into the Christian and Canadian cultural framework. Finally, an argument for the practical application of this theomusicology will be laid out in the third chapter. This thesis will show that in order for the church to fulfill the missional task of evangelizing the unchurched through worship, it

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<sup>16</sup> Bert Polman, “Praise the Name of Jesus: Are All Praise and Worship Songs for the Congregation?,” in *The Message in the Music: Studying Contemporary Praise and Worship*, eds. Robert Woods and Brian Walrath (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2007), Kindle Edition: Introduction, Paragraph 2. There are a variety of ways to refer to and categorize these genres and their subsets, as in most types of music.

needs to use vernacular, functional, communal liturgical music, of which rock is a good example.

*Church and Culture: A Framework of Ultimate Concern*

Just a world that we all must share

It's not enough just to stand and stare

Is it only a dream that there'll be no more turning away?

Pink Floyd, "No More Turning Away," from *A Momentary Lapse of Reason*, 1987

The human interpretation of the relationship between church and culture has always been contentious.<sup>17</sup> Paul urged the first-century Christian gathering in Rome to “not be conformed to this world.”<sup>18</sup> Cultic idol worship threatened the monotheism that Paul and the early church leaders in Jerusalem held as primary, even above purity standards and rituals.<sup>19</sup> In the midst of these controversies, something needed to be done to ensure that new Gentile Christians knew that although Jesus’ Way allowed for some cultural flexibility, there were lines that could not be crossed. As Christianity moved from a fringe movement into the world’s most prolific religion, the understanding of the relationship between church and culture had to evolve.

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<sup>17</sup> Don H. Compier, *Listening to Popular Music* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2013), 14.

<sup>18</sup> Rom 12:2a, New Revised Standard Version [NRSV].

<sup>19</sup> See the first apostolic council in Jerusalem, Acts 15:1-35. For contention, see Acts 10:9-16.

The term ‘culture’ here is used anthropologically. Kathryn Tanner writes that “culture in an anthropological sense is an originary formative influence on individual persons and as such must be exercised primarily through unconscious means.”<sup>20</sup> Although culture is indeterminate, porous, inconsistent, and rarely self-contained, it is the medium for our interactions, sense of belonging, and social understanding. Tanner offers that “theology is a specific version of the general cultural quest in that it seeks some ultimate point of reference that helps people come to terms with the mysteriousness of life.”<sup>21</sup> The relationship between church and culture ideally should point both toward the revelation of the divine.

Richard Niebuhr offers five different frameworks that describe historical approaches to the relationship between Christianity and culture.<sup>22</sup> Beyond the two polar dualistic opposites of ‘Christ against culture’ and ‘the Christ of culture,’ Niebuhr presents the three hybrid approaches: ‘Christ above culture,’ ‘Christ and culture in paradox,’ and ‘Christ the transformer of culture.’ Of these, the conversionist, or, ‘Christ the transformer of culture’ is the most helpful for informing a missiology of radical welcome. This thesis takes the position that the church’s role is to take the proffered culture in which one is living as a gift from God, in and with which the church must work obediently.<sup>23</sup>

To determine how the church can live into this responsibility, this thesis will employ Paul Tillich's cultural conversionist theology.<sup>24</sup> Tillich sees Christ and culture as

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<sup>20</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), Kindle Edition: location 232.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, location 943-944.

<sup>22</sup> H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1951).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>24</sup> Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (New York, NY: Oxford University, 1959).

being in correlational dialogue and concludes that the church must be in conversation with the dominant culture in order to say anything relevant. God is expressed universally through ‘ultimate concern’ – wherever people are expressing ultimate concern, they are connecting with and communicating the divine. Tillich sees culture itself as the form of religion, making it the very thing with which theologians and the faithful must be conversationally engaged.

It could be argued that the theological standard for the relationship between God and culture is one of hostility, of *kosmos* versus *basileia*. The conversionist positions of Niebuhr and Tillich point to something else. Niebuhr writes that “culture is under God's sovereign rule, and... the Christian must carry on cultural work in obedience to the Lord.”<sup>25</sup> In this view, all works have the potential for good. Our cultural forms and our participation in them are converted by our faith in Christ; we are cultural beings in relationship with Jesus. The Spirit is active and at work in our culture and can reveal the divinity all around us. Tillich goes further, suggesting instead that culture is the implicit expression of divinity. Faith harmonizes expressions of ultimate concern with the author of Creation, thereby revealing where untenable obstacles have been placed between God and the way God is revealed. Culture becomes the medium for theophany rather than the source of corruption. Our inability to find God in cultural expressions of ultimate concern then becomes a personal deficiency rather than an absence of divinity. This is not the same as saying all culture is good, but instead that all expressions of ultimate concern have divine substance, and that faith can unlock our ability to access and be in

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<sup>25</sup> Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 191.

relationship with this omnipresent divinity. Our faith in Jesus enables us to discern and access the underlying ultimate concern expressed through culture which is the form of religion.

Tillich claims, conversely, that religion is the thing for which all culture strives, the bridge which spans the estrangement of our longing.<sup>26</sup> Some big assumptions are made here about people's universal need for meaning and their innate desire to search for it. If we are not searchers, then Tillich's position is moot. This thesis assumes that people search for meaning and that theology is concerned with the substance of that quest. It also makes some fundamental assumptions about the nature of human culture: it is social, it is the product of human achievement, it serves humanity, and it is based upon values.<sup>27</sup> Culture also relies upon human adoption and transmission; should just one generation neglect to pass it on, the whole collective of previous achievements is potentially lost. In order to determine the truth and viability of church practices, culture remains the most reliable gauge available to us.<sup>28</sup>

If worship does not consider and engage people's cultural formation, it has become an obstacle to intimacy with them. Barry Liesch sees the unchurched as today's Gentiles, precluded from the intimacy of the dinner table because of the church's cultural forms.<sup>29</sup> In the book of Acts, this is a problem of Peter's, not the Gentiles with whom his

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<sup>26</sup> Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 91. Estrangement is a condition where we are separated from the source of our meaning, creating a sense of lack which, when processed in a healthy way, drives us to quest or search.

<sup>27</sup> Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 32-37.

<sup>28</sup> Trevor Hart, *Faith Thinking: The Dynamics of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 201.

<sup>29</sup> Barry Liesch, *The New Worship: Straight Talk on Music and the Church*, expanded edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 178-184.

ritual practices prevent him being in relationship.<sup>30</sup> The church that embodies a missiology of radical welcome will hear God's command to eat with those who are excluded.

According to the conversionist framework, culture itself is not the means for corruption; rather, humanity's corruption of the goodness of culture has perverted it into a tool of sin.<sup>31</sup> The genesis of all things is the Word who is Christ, who is sent because of God's redeeming (rather than condemning) love.<sup>32</sup> It is the turning away from ultimate concern which is wicked, not the thing which turns, nor that to which it turns. Disorder comes from the turning away from the relationship with God, not the substantial reality of culture itself. As Niebuhr writes, "the full realization of the kingdom of Christ did not, then, mean the substitution of a new universal society for all the separate organizations of men [*sic*], but rather the participation of all these in the one universal kingdom of which Christ is the head." Religion and culture are correlational dialogue partners rather than oppositional critics, built on the understanding that religion is interested in divinity manifested in ultimate concern.

Culture itself is one of the primary ways that ultimate concern is expressed. With a conflation of religion and ultimate concern, total atheism becomes almost impossible since atheists still have some kind of underlying ultimate concern.<sup>33</sup> Tillich calls this

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<sup>30</sup> Acts 10:9-16.

<sup>31</sup> Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 194.

<sup>32</sup> Jn 1:1-3; 3:16-17.

<sup>33</sup> Is this too hopeful? Plenty of atheists live deep, meaningful lives steeped in what I would call ultimate concern. There might exist people who have no ultimate concern at all – no passion, no need of meaning whatsoever, who are totally fine with life as meaningless on a deeply affected level. As someone captivated by God, I have difficulty imagining it.

divinity regardless of its own or others' recognition of it as divine.<sup>34</sup> It is patronizing, but Tillich holds that establishing God's 'existence' is a large part of the problem of discussing matters of faith with the unchurched. God is not an object among other objects, but rather the essential foundation in which all can find root and being. The church then must point authentically to the transcendent which permeates all aspects of life.<sup>35</sup>

Philosophically and theologically, the concept of transcendence has a long and incredibly complex history. It can refer to a state of self-awareness, social consciousness, or connectedness with the divine. In this thesis, transcendence is referring to the heightened awareness of one's source of being, ultimate concern, or the possibilities beyond the limitations of human experience. Tillich suggests that this is not something we are able to do on our own, but rather affirms the necessity of the divine acting through culture to access and explore what he calls 'Spiritual Presence'.<sup>36</sup>

Culture, and in particular, art, has a way of communicating and illuminating the divine beyond the limitations of our post-Enlightenment categorizations. We can see a reflection of ultimate concern in all of culture's expressions, meaning they are therefore theological expressions.<sup>37</sup> This is partly what culture-as-religion's-form looks like. To discover what was important to a culture in history, look to the artistic expressions of that time. This remains applicable in our own time. Furthermore, a lot can be similarly learned

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<sup>34</sup> Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 5.

<sup>35</sup> Jn 1:14.

<sup>36</sup> Andrew O'Neill, *Tillich: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London, ON: Continuum, 2008), 94.

<sup>37</sup> Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 27, 47.



about the church, and, by extension, the church's understanding of God, by looking at its culture, art, and liturgy.

To better understand how culture and art express ultimate concern, we can turn to other symbolic expressions such as language. The word 'moon' is representative of the natural satellite orbiting the Earth. Although the word is effective at eliciting the thought of the thing itself, the word remains a symbol and not the thing at all. We inherently know this limitation and yet find ways to express the deeper meanings that are sometimes obfuscated and elusive. In fact, symbols are particularly effective at drawing out hidden realities beyond the limitations of objects, and even take part in the meaning-making process.<sup>38</sup> Songs and poems have been written expressing the beauty of the moon. Christianity's most important dates remain in chronological concert with the moon's phases, and many people throughout history have worshipped and attributed special meaning to this cold, lifeless rock. All these things, too, are symbols, nested in the symbolic four letters M-O-O-N. If it is this difficult to understand completely the fullness of the meaning of a sky-rock, how can theology even approach a complete expression of the divine? Religion, though interested in the entire breadth of the nesting of symbols, seeks to express their source. In Christianity, understanding does not come only epistemologically but also through revelatory transformative ontological encounter leading to and shaping ongoing relationship. Religion is not a feeling, it is not a symbol,

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<sup>38</sup> Russell Re Manning, "Tillich's Theology of Art," in *The Cambridge Companion to Paul Tillich*, ed. Russell Re Manning (New York, NY: Cambridge University, 2008), 157.

and it (properly expressed) resists making God an object among objects; however, all of these conditioned approaches help reveal ultimate concern.<sup>39</sup>

The efficacy of symbols is difficult to criticize; they exist and continue so long as they are useful to their relevant culture.<sup>40</sup> Sometimes symbols remain expressively useful beyond their contextual relevance, but they tend to move toward extinction when their situational usefulness expires. This poses a challenge to the church to be aware of how its own symbols betray its estrangement from contemporary culture and the unchurched. As Tillich writes, “[religious symbols] truth is their adequacy to the religious situation in which they are created, and their inadequacy to another situation is their untruth.”<sup>41</sup> Tanner adds, “interpretations of symbols and categories specific to Christianity are existentially meaningful and have a claim on truth only to the extent they disclose and are adequate to common human experience, that is, basic structures of human thought and action fundamental to human life at all times and places.”<sup>42</sup> Many find deep meaning in the culture and vernacular of the past. If it is more proportionally prevalent in the church than in other institutions and organizations, it is cause for consideration. Some churches in decline, like the UCC, claim radical welcome as a part of their mission, but their forms betray their expression of their missiology. Liturgical forms that have lost their ability to speak to the dominant culture are not adequate for symbolizing truth to a majority of twenty-first century Canadians.

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<sup>39</sup> Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 58-59.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>42</sup> Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, location 964-966.

Culture is the form of religion, and “form is the ontologically decisive element in every artistic creation.”<sup>43</sup> Art can point toward expression of meaning beyond its creator. When we see movements in style, it reflects a shift in culture and the pulse of ultimate concern. As Russell Re Manning writes, “if culture as a whole is the expression of the totality of humanity’s creative self-interpretation, it is in art that the character of this self-interpretive activity becomes most clearly visible.”<sup>44</sup> There is no style which does not point toward this kind of meaning; even those styles which are considered ugly and destructive point, though perhaps more critically, at ultimate concern.<sup>45</sup> Art is key to symbolizing religious revelation for the contemporary culturally-formed individual, and theology can find in art a natural conversation partner.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, secular art can help the church understand the people it is commissioned to welcome.

The ideology of estrangement is a foundational assumption of the missiology of radical welcome. It is a reflection of Jesus’ welcome to the unwelcomed.<sup>47</sup> In Tillich's words, the role of the church is “to overcome as far as it is possible by mere thought the faithful gap between religion and culture, thus reconciling concerns which are not strange to each other but have been estranged from each other.”<sup>48</sup> The church must use language and symbols that make it possible to be in relationship and conversation with contemporary Canadians for it to begin bridging this estrangement. The substance of this bridge continues to be found in Jesus, who suggests sinners and outcasts are closer to

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<sup>43</sup> Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 70.

<sup>44</sup> Manning, “Tillich’s Theology of Art,” 156.

<sup>45</sup> Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 73.

<sup>46</sup> Manning, “Tillich’s Theology of Art,” 154.

<sup>47</sup> Mt 25.

<sup>48</sup> Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 29.

divinity than the religious leaders.<sup>49</sup> A radically welcoming church is defined by a Gospel of Jesus encountered as Good News to those in despair and doubt.

There have been many sound criticisms of Tillich's theology of culture. As related to contemporary art, Tillich is accused of falling into the trap of accommodation. The religious value of art is not necessarily connected to the whims of cultural popularity. The artworks that Tillich suggests evoke connection with ultimate concern are the kinds of work that promote a subjectivist character more Nietzschean than anything Christian. Tillich "has been taken in by Expressionism as the Trojan Horse of a secular and nihilistic aesthetic alternative to religion."<sup>50</sup> Critics posit that he gives in to popular culture at the expense of religious artistic expression. These critics say when popular culture is allowed to dictate ecclesial culture, the Gospel gets pushed aside and diluted.<sup>51</sup> However, these criticisms reveal a possible unholy conflation of the Gospel with ecclesial genres and art forms of a past era. Tillich's artistic examples are intended to emphasize the inadequacy of ecclesial forms which are unintelligible to the unchurched. It is not about accommodation, but rather discernment of how the art of every generation points anew to the eternity present in every age. The primacy of genre is not the issue, but rather the ability of church forms to radically welcome the unchurched of any given era and lead them to ontological encounter with the Christ.

The church's denial of secular culture and secular culture's increasing irreligiosity may not be mutually exclusive. Increasing biblical illiteracy in a time of increased access

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<sup>49</sup> Mt 21:31.

<sup>50</sup> Manning, "Tillich's Theology of Art," 168.

<sup>51</sup> Mark Evans, *Open Up the Doors: Music in the Modern Church* (London, UK: Equinox, 2006), 66.

to information and persisting interest in spirituality shows popular culture and Christian forms are estranged. Cultural engagement is key not only because it is an expression of welcome, but because comprehension is fundamental to communication. The mission of the church includes communicating the Gospel to those who have not heard it. If the receiver's language is used, it is much more likely to be heard and internalized. This is partly why the Canadian population is losing interest in the church at a time when interest in spirituality and even Christianity has not waned. CBC radio shared a story about Kanye West's 'Sunday Service,' an ongoing Christian gathering.<sup>52</sup> Usually hosted from his home, West has brought this music-driven worship experience on the road at times, including to the Coachella music festival in 2019. It has been attended by well-known celebrities such as Katy Perry, Brad Pitt, Courtney Love, Jaden Smith, Idris Elba, Kylie Jenner, Chance the Rapper, and Justin Bieber, with the last two participating as featured performers.<sup>53</sup> Modern cultural engagement with Christianity was a curiosity to the CBC host, Tom Power, who was audibly flabbergasted at the list of artists who have participated as professing Christians, particularly rapper DMX who delivered a sermon and led prayers at the event on March 17, 2019. Faith has been relegated to the private sphere, partly because the public image of Christianity has been driven and managed by an institutional church that has not engaged people where they are. As F. D. Maurice notes, when a particular kind of ecclesial culture is considered superior, "Christianity is

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<sup>52</sup> q, "Kanye West Is Bringing His 'Sunday Service' to Coachella," directed by Danielle Grogan, featuring Tom Power, aired April 5, 2019, on CBC Radio One, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/q/friday-april-5-2019-terry-gilliam-pup-and-more-1.5084776/kanye-west-is-bringing-his-sunday-service-to-coachella-1.5085121>

<sup>53</sup> Andrea Wurzbarger, "Can I Get an Amen? Justin Bieber, Brad Pitt and Every Other Celeb Who Has Attended Kanye West's Sunday Service," *People*, February 24, 2020, accessed May 13, 2020, <https://people.com/music/kanye-west-sunday-service-celebrities-who-have-gone/>

substituted for Christ, and the defense of Christian culture takes the place of obedience to its Lord.”<sup>54</sup> Trevor Hart echoes Maurice: “We are called to make disciples of Jesus, not to clone our own particular form of Christianity.”<sup>55</sup> The church must make sure it is not requiring people to undergo a ‘cultural circumcision’ as a prerequisite for participation in worship and Christian faith communities.<sup>56</sup>

For an example of engaging people where they are and using a language they understand, we can look at what has worked and what has not in international missions. Missiologist Alan Tippett tells a story about some missionaries who travelled to the Fiji Islands in the nineteenth century.<sup>57</sup> After learning the local language, the missionaries translated the lyrics of some hymns and asked local musicians to set them to their own unique style of chant and drums. It was wildly successful and the hymns were sung in the community prolifically. Later, when a new group of missionaries refreshed the first wave, they were appalled. They insisted the hymns be set back to their original tunes and forbade their singing in the local style. As a result, the people stopped singing the hymns altogether and the gains of the original missionaries were reversed.

If it has been established that cultural engagement is key to evangelization, then liturgists should be intensely interested in the anthropology of the dominant culture which it seeks to evangelize. In the early twenty-first century, the Canadian church finds itself on the tail end of a great cultural shift that began in the early 1960s which changed the dominant value system. The next section will explore this change and consider why the

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<sup>54</sup> Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 225.

<sup>55</sup> Hart, *Faith Thinking*, 187.

<sup>56</sup> Liesch, *New Worship*, 187.

<sup>57</sup> As cited in Liesch, *New Worship*, 33-34.

church seems stuck in the previous cultural milieu in which it had its ‘golden age.’<sup>58</sup> If the church insists on worshipping using cultural forms which are difficult for the unchurched to engage in, then it may be doing the same thing that the well-meaning Fijian missionaries did in the above example.

*Post-Christian Evangelization: From Duty to Authenticity*

Tell me where is the love in what your prophet has said?  
 Man, it sounds to me just like a prison for the walking dead  
 I've got a message for you and your twisted hell  
 You better turn around and blow your kiss goodbye to life eternal, Angel  
 Jeff Buckley, “Eternal Life,” from *Grace*, 1994

There have been countless theories of cultural change in the Western world, but what practically all seem to agree on is that change is a constant. Although the fundamental drives and desires might be the same, this generation is not like the generation before. If a cultural narrative could be found that spoke universally for all humanity, it would be a lot easier to formulate an ecclesiology that applied universally. As it stands, the church has the Scriptures to guide its forms, and yet as was argued in the previous section, the church finds itself ministering in the context of a particular culture – the same as the church of every generation. When using the Bible to guide ecclesial

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<sup>58</sup> John H. Young, “A Golden Age: The United Church of Canada, 1946-1960,” in *The United Church of Canada: A History*, ed. Don Schweitzer (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University, 2012).

forms, the church needs to remember that even the early church was shaped by and responded to the needs of its own culture.

Every generation of the church has continued to work out the appropriate way to “sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land.”<sup>59</sup> The church is set apart as a chosen people, not to conform to the patterns of this world, but by grace to fulfil its Christ-given mission in the world.<sup>60</sup> Many have tried to lock in a liturgical standard, and yet even if the church were to mimic early forms, it would still be borrowing from the cultural norms of that era. If the church wants to radically welcome and evangelize the Canadian unchurched through worship, it must then form its worship with that intent.<sup>61</sup> Understanding this, the cultural realities of twenty-first-century Canada become of paramount importance.

Religious disaffiliation is on the rise; in between 1971 and 2011, people with no religious affiliation rose from five to twenty six percent, and in 2011 only twenty seven percent of Canadians reported attending worship services at least once a month.<sup>62</sup>

Although this is a bleak report considering the huge shifts in religious activity over the past 40 years, it also tells the church that there remains a large number of people who are still engaged.

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<sup>59</sup> Ps 137:4. Estrangement is almost built-in to Christian theology. Some read John 17:14-19 and say the church is to be in the world but not of it. Perhaps a more helpful approach is to say the church is not of the world, but it is *sent into* it. For more on this, see David Mathis, “Let’s Revise the Popular Phrase ‘In, But Not Of,’” *desiringGod*, August 29, 2019, accessed April 13, 2020, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/lets-revise-the-popular-phrase-in-but-not-of>

<sup>60</sup> 1 Pet 2:9; Rom 12:2.

<sup>61</sup> Norma deWaal Malefyt and Howard Vanderwell, *Designing Worship Together: Models and Strategies for Worship Planning* (Herndon, VA: Alban, 2005), 135-136.

<sup>62</sup> “Canada’s Changing Religious Landscape,” Pew Research Center, June 21, 2013. Accessed April 9, 2019. <https://www.pewforum.org/2013/06/27/canadas-changing-religious-landscape/>



Charles Taylor calls this current era the ‘Age of Authenticity.’<sup>63</sup> Since the time of the world wars, North American culture and values have changed. In the time of the wars, people were driven by a sense of duty and obligation, an era Taylor calls the ‘Age of Mobilization.’ These values drove the huge economic growth in the 1950s by leading people to show their duty to their country through their participation in the economy. As Andrew Root writes:

Having picked up gun and grenade in the European and Pacific theatres, the weapons of the Cold War were tract housing, GE refrigerators, and Buicks. Unlike the Battle of the Bulge, this fight actually *felt good*; instead of your duty giving you frostbite, you got a frozen TV dinner.<sup>64</sup>

This sense of duty also drove people to church in droves, partly as a reaction to the atheism of the enemy in the Cold War. In the 1960s, people became aware of the way their sense of duty was being mobilized for capital gain, and trust in the social structures and institutions was drawn into apt criticism. Consumers discovered that duty and obligation had been made into mystical beasts that could be manipulated for corporate profit. It was at this point that the heart of the Western world shifted toward something else: counter to the ideologies of fascists, the new god would be freedom. The new enemy, then, would be conformity, and hence the age of authenticity was fully born.

The unchurched are longing for authenticity and are met in congregations by forms firmly rooted in a previous age shaped by duty and obligation. Bibby warns that “the age where religious leaders could appeal to obligation and duty to get people into the

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<sup>63</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007).

<sup>64</sup> Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church’s Obsession with Youthfulness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 21-22, italics original.

pews is over.”<sup>65</sup> Root suggests that Pentecostals and other charismatic denominations have fared better, since they have created space for authentic transcendent experience.<sup>66</sup> Most modern mainline churches have deemed charismatic and ecstatic experiences to be at best a corollary rather than the heart of faith.<sup>67</sup> This comes down to authenticity. Root expands:

In our own time... that which is authentic is more important than that which is holy, good, or righteous... it is better to be bad but authentic than to be good but phony... In the age of authenticity, of course, sex scandals and money laundering [in the church] are black eyes, but not because they show that the church serves a false transcendent force or that its leaders have given themselves over to the devil. Rather, it’s because they reveal a deeper problematic for us contemporaries: they expose the church as inauthentic and fake. If they preach one thing and do the opposite, that is inauthentic because it lacks integrity... But we can at least respect an evil and corrupt corporation for being consistent with its stated purpose. It is who it says it is, and that is honourable. Worse than being evil is being inauthentic.<sup>68</sup>

The Scriptures are replete with examples of inauthenticity as a prime characteristic of evil. However, the church has held on to traditions which it inherited that are not representative of the current cultural paradigm. If they are authentic expressions, meaning that they spurn passionate action and facilitate an ontological encounter with the divine, then certainly they should continue and the church should invite people to adopt them as Christian actions. Worse than being outdated, though, our liturgical forms are being reproduced without passion. As Root challenges, “in the age of authenticity, that which is

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<sup>65</sup> Reginald W. Bibby, *Resilient Gods: Being Pro-Religious, Low Religious, or No Religious in Canada* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2017), 18.

<sup>66</sup> Root, *Faith Formation*, 8-9; transcendent experience facilitates ontological encounter.

<sup>67</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 410.

<sup>68</sup> Root, *Faith Formation*, 7.

boring is inauthentic; that which is lame is a repressed lie.”<sup>69</sup> Root shares the example of a young man who will not go to church because he finds it boring, and yet this same young man eagerly declares his willingness to die for the Gospel.<sup>70</sup> This is the hallmark of the age: people of faith are willing to die for Jesus, but they are not willing to be bored for him. For contemporary Canadians, it is better to die than to be inauthentic.

The desire for worship is not dead in post-Christendom. The 1960s launched the age of authenticity, and yet we will see in the next chapter that religious themes, language, and spirituality reign abound in popular culture as evidence of a longing for the sacred.<sup>71</sup> The church claims to desire authentic relationship with those who are seeking faith but it resists moving from century-old forms, music, and language. Here is the heart of this thesis; liturgical music must plumb a theomusicology that matches the complexity, authenticity, and depth of popular musicians. Nice and tasteful are not enough to stir all hearts to be open to ontological encounter – music must be presented authentically. Guy Jansen writes that

the Holy Spirit chooses to work in a great many different ways, and a rigid set of music rules is the last thing needed by any community of faith. Authenticity and genuineness is highly prized by the latest (Y) generation and many others. Baloney disguised in excellence is being rejected.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>71</sup> Michael J. Gilmour, *Gods and Guitars: Seeking the Sacred in Post-1960s Popular Music* (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2009); a longing from being estranged.

<sup>72</sup> Guy Jansen, “When the Music Fades: The Artistic Worth of Worship Song Melodies,” in *The Message in the Music: Studying Contemporary Praise and Worship*, eds. Robert Woods and Brian Walrath (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2007), “Conclusion,” Paragraph 5.

The church needs to understand the ‘why’ behind its liturgical forms rather than passively replicating them out of a sense of duty or obligation.

Living in an age of authenticity presents an opportunity for the church to reclaim the physical social space which has been threatened by our technological reality. Appeals to duty and tradition were never the church’s strongest arguments. Radical welcome and relationship are more authentic and more harmonious with the ministry of Jesus. In order to understand how worship can contribute to the mission to this authentic age, this thesis will turn to where modern theomusicology finds itself in the context of history, where music has successfully driven liturgical formation and ecclesiology, and how the contemporary spiritual formation of the unchurched has produced a ripe mission field for the church in the twenty-first century.

## Chapter 2: More Than a Feeling

Don't feel like Satan, but I am to them

Neil Young, "Rockin' in the Free World," from *Freedom*, 1989

### *A Brief History of Church Music: Controversy Through the Ages*

Throughout most of human history, people sang. To be human was to sing. This continues in many parts of the world, but in the Canadian context music has become something which people are much more likely to consume than produce. Other than singing "Happy Birthday" and the national anthem, group singing outside the church has almost entirely disappeared in Canadian culture.<sup>73</sup> If people are not singing in church, they may not be singing at all. For the average adult, church is the only place they sing with others or hear live music.<sup>74</sup>

The advent of recorded music has meant that music is most often delivered to passive listeners. Music composition has reflected this passive relationship by creating music which is solo-oriented rather than participatory.<sup>75</sup> This is the kind of cultural formation with which people come to church, and so it is no surprise that congregational singing is in decline. UCC theomusicologist Bruce Harding claims that the act of

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<sup>73</sup> James Notebaart, "Introduction," in *Leading the Church's Song*, ed. Robert Buckley Farlee (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 4.

<sup>74</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *All in Sync: How Music and Art Are Revitalizing American Religion* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California, 2003), 134.

<sup>75</sup> Notebaart, "Introduction," 5.

congregational singing is living out the Gospel's "radical rethinking and questioning of social norms."<sup>76</sup> He writes:

What the hell is happening in worship today? I use the word 'hell' quite intentionally, because it is certainly not heavenly! What has happened to the great tradition of congregational song? In many congregations throughout North America and Europe, singing has become a pitiful experience, a few voices straining to carry the tune while the majority dutifully mumble along, or wait in stoic silence for the song to end. We sing not because 'we cannot keep from singing,' but out of a sense of duty, merely because *it is tradition*.<sup>77</sup>

The same act which is intended to reshape participants' disposition has instead become an obstacle for many. When forms are replicated out of a sense of duty without an appreciation for their meaning and purpose, allegiances might be misdirected to oblige the forms themselves rather than the spirit, the ultimate concern, which formed those traditions in the first place.

The quick successive stylistic changes in popular music over the last 100 years may be a unique historical phenomenon, but it is not the first time in history music has changed drastically. It has been particularly so in the church, where music has been a part of the fabric of controversy throughout the last two millennia. As cultures' art forms are vehicles of expression of ultimate concern, it is no surprise that art has also inspired or been drawn into arguments of what is appropriate or ideal forms of expression.

Music and musical instruments are fundamental to the shape of the psalms and to ancient worship in Israel. Seventeen of the psalms reference musical instruments in their

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<sup>76</sup> Bruce Harding, "To Sing or Not to Sing: That Is the Question," in *The Emerging Christian Way: Thoughts, Stories and Wisdom for a Faith of Transformation*, ed. Michael Schwartzentruber (Kelowna, BC: Copperhouse, 2006), 191.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 190, emphasis original.

prefaces. In the Hebrew Scriptures, a total of 29 different instruments are identified, and although eight are unknown typologically to modern scholars, the general agreement is that all fit into three categories: wind, stringed, and percussion.<sup>78</sup> Dancing, hand clapping, and embodied worship was integrated into these ancient liturgies; ancient Levitical musicians saw music as a path to make God’s presence felt and known.<sup>79</sup> As written in 2 Chronicles

all the levitical singers, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, their sons and kindred, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals, harps, and lyres, stood east of the altar with one hundred twenty priests who were trumpeters. It was the duty of the trumpeters and singers to make themselves heard in unison in praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, and when the song was raised, with trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments, in praise to the Lord,

“For he is good,  
for his steadfast love endures forever,”

the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.<sup>80</sup>

The Levite musician-priests were specialists and hence expected to focus on making music on behalf of, rather than in coordination with, the gathered community.

There is no debating that liturgical music was used in the New Testament era, but the details regarding content, genre, form, and future application have generated inconclusive discussions for thousands of years. Jesus sings a hymn at the conclusion of the last supper.<sup>81</sup> Most scholars agree that Philippians 2:6-11 is a hymn that had been

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<sup>78</sup> Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeev, *Orthodox Christianity Volume III: The Architecture, Icons, and Music of the Orthodox Church*, trans. Andrei Tepper (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 2014), 248.

<sup>79</sup> Liesch, *New Worship*, 165.

<sup>80</sup> 2 Ch 5:12-14, NRSV; the title “levitical” is not capitalized in the NSRV.

<sup>81</sup> Mt 26:30.

used in the nascent church predating Paul's letters and the Gospels.<sup>82</sup> Paul treasured this ancient hymn as a perfect expression of Jesus' life, ministry, and meaning. The earliest Christians sang of Jesus

who, though he was in the form of God,  
 did not regard equality with God  
 as something to be exploited,  
 but emptied himself,  
 taking the form of a slave,  
 being born in human likeness.  
 And being found in human form,  
 he humbled himself  
 and became obedient to the point of death—  
 even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him  
 and gave him the name  
 that is above every name,  
 so that at the name of Jesus  
 every knee should bend,  
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
 and every tongue should confess  
 that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
 to the glory of God the Father.<sup>83</sup>

The power of music to teach theology was known and used by Jesus, Paul, and the early church.

Some who argue against the use of rock music in the church quote the following Scripture: "Be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs

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<sup>82</sup> Root, *Faith Formation*, 160.

<sup>83</sup> Phil 2:6-11.



among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts.”<sup>84</sup> Those that use Ephesians 5:18-19 to condemn the use of particular genres in worship need to read a little closer. The conjunction καὶ is used between three broadening types of music; ψαλμοῖς καὶ ὕμνοις καὶ ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς – traditional psalms *and* sacred hymns *and* songs which relate to the human spirit. The same list including ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς shows up again in Colossians.<sup>85</sup> In its context, ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς refers broadly to all music which speaks of humankind's universal religious quest.<sup>86</sup> The use of these verses to either condemn or condone the use of particular genres is simply impossible, as the information available regarding the genre of early church music paints a vague picture at best.<sup>87</sup> What is known is that music generally was important, considered deeply spiritual, and was an authentic way for early Christians to connect to God.

In the first centuries of the organized church, the controversies that would hound the liturgical use of music began in earnest. These controversies were largely rooted in the understanding of the power of music and its spiritual use throughout the pagan world. Church leadership, acknowledging music's emotive character, actively demoted and restrained its liturgical role in the early centuries of the church.<sup>88</sup> The unaccompanied human voice quickly became the only universally agreed upon ecclesial musical instrument.<sup>89</sup> Clement of Alexandria in 198 writes in *Paedagogus*, “let the pipe be

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<sup>84</sup> Eph 5:18b-19; William Frederick, *Christian Rock Music: Wolf or Sheep? A Theological Analysis* (Raleigh, NC: Lulu, 2007), 58.

<sup>85</sup> Col 3:16.

<sup>86</sup> Liesch, *New Worship*, 51.

<sup>87</sup> Alfevev, *Orthodox Christianity*, 263.

<sup>88</sup> Swee Hong Lim and Lester Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus: A Concise History of Contemporary Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2017), 57.

<sup>89</sup> Alfevev, *Orthodox Christianity*, 269-270.

resigned to shepherds, and the flute to the superstitious who are engrossed in idolatry. For, in truth, such instruments are to be banished from the temperate banquet, being more suitable to beasts than men, and the more irrational portion of mankind.”<sup>90</sup> In *Protrepticus*, Clement suggests that instrumentation in the Hebrew Scriptures should be considered allegorically, suggesting that where horns appear it represents the resurrection, and that strings symbolize the human nerves.<sup>91</sup> In the fourth century, Pseudo-Justin wrote in *Answers to the Orthodox* that

singing by itself is not pleasing to infants; but singing accompanied by lifeless instruments, dancing, and rattling is. Therefore the use of such instruments is prohibited in churches as well as everything else that is characteristic of children. Only pure singing is permitted because it is pleasing to the soul.<sup>92</sup>

The general conclusion of the early Church Fathers was that instrumentation in the Hebrew Scriptures was only possible due to “God’s ‘condescension’ to the spiritual sickness of the ancient Jews.”<sup>93</sup> This kind of antisemitism is unnerving to our current sensibilities; even in context, though, it further emphasizes that these early church leaders understood that music had discernable power over people’s spiritual formation.

Documented attempts to control and influence music throughout the institutional church stem from the Synod of Whitby in 664.<sup>94</sup> This is the same Synod which was primarily concerned with finding a common date for Easter “and is thus responsible for plumping for one confusing formula rather than the other, which has messed up the

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<sup>90</sup> As cited by Alfevev, *Orthodox Christianity*, 266.

<sup>91</sup> Alfevev, *Orthodox Christianity*, 268-269.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 268.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Andrew Gant, *O Sing unto the Lord: A History of English Church Music* (London, UK: Profile, 2015), 3-4.

school holidays once a year from that day to this.”<sup>95</sup> By the second Council of Clovesho in 747, monks were forbidden from singing or reading anything that was not sanctioned by Rome at daily hours and services. These established rules for the liturgy, including the promulgation of plainsong, would eventually lead to the earliest-known liturgical musical notation, dating from the ninth century. In these centuries, worship music was relegated to trained worship leaders with the average worshipper strictly forbidden from taking part.<sup>96</sup>

The origin of the genre currently known as ‘church music’ arguably begins in the period following the great schism of 1054, with the tradition of the Western church’s use of Latin chant and the pipe organ. This influence can be traced through the Vikings’ and the Normans’ musical development under the watch of Osmund, Bishop of Salisbury in 1078, including canticles, responsories, prayers, and even some hymns which are still used today.<sup>97</sup> From this same period, the direction for the ‘ordinary’ (Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Benedictus, Angus Dei) sung at Mass are found along with the ‘propers’ (Introit, Offertory) which change with the seasons. These melodies served as a foundation, with each generation adding a level of complexity to the music and choreography. However, for the next 500 years the average worshipper would “no more expect to understand and participate than he would expect his donkey to do so.”<sup>98</sup> Church music at this point remained the regulated possession of the priestly class.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid. Theses need comic relief.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 4-9.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 2, 11-12. “Ave Maria,” e.g.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 13.

The controversy over what constituted appropriate music continued to intensify. Heresy claims were launched in 1140 at a critic of Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny, for suggesting that “God laughs at ecclesiastical chants because he loves only the holy will, and is not to be summoned by high-pitched voices, or caressed by well-turned tunes.”<sup>99</sup> Aelred, Abbot of Rievaulx, wrote a chapter entitled “The Vain Pleasure of the Ears” in 1167 which proffered that

sound should not be given precedence over meaning, but sound with meaning should generally be allowed to stimulate greater attachment. Therefore the sound should be so moderate, so marked by gravity that it does not captivate the whole spirit to amusement in itself, but leaves the greater part to the meaning.<sup>100</sup>

Aelred goes on to compare elaborate singing to horses’ neighing, and declares that male singers are emasculated by participating.<sup>101</sup> The eleventh-century monk Heribert considered chanting to be “a vanity invented to please men.”<sup>102</sup> The power of music was recognized by these theologians and it was reigned in to assure people were not unintentionally led astray by its emotive beauty.

From the tenth century, Gregorian plainsong continued to evolve into polyphonic styles. This led to the setting aside of especially trained men and women to take on the musical responsibilities which were previously reserved for priests and monks, giving birth to the church choir.<sup>103</sup> As English music and liturgy developed, it became more

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>101</sup> As cited in Gant, *Sing unto the Lord*, 379-380, endnote 17. Aelred wrote “Aliquando, quod pudet dicere, in equinos hinnitus cogitur, aliquand virile vigore desposito in femineae vocis.” He must have been a lot of fun at parties.

<sup>102</sup> Gant, *Sing unto the Lord*, 141.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 14.

entwined with contemporary culture. Around the fourteenth century, secular genres were incorporated into worship, where sacred and secular music

shared not only the same musical style but the same music. Richard Ledrede, Bishop of Ossory, handed his Franciscan colleagues a book of sixty Latin hymns, known as the *Red Book of Ossory*, between about 1320 and 1360. Some of them have the *incipit*, or opening phrase, of a secular Latin song marked alongside. This gives the reader the tune for each poem.<sup>104</sup>

The use of secular lyrics remained something of controversy, even if the music itself was drawn from secular sources. One anonymous priest noted that this book was provided so that worship leaders' "throats and their holy prayers to God should not be defiled by theatrical, turpid and secular songs; and, since they are the singers, to provide them with notes which they already know, to use according to the dictates of what is required."<sup>105</sup> It was generally accepted at this point that vernacular tunes were being used, as it was the common musical language upon which the worship leaders could draw. It was the best way to ensure that the music was familiar enough to serve its liturgical purpose.

The controversy over the power of music remained in the forefront. Pope John XXII in 1320 quoted Augustine by declaring "when the singing delights me more than the words... I would prefer not to listen."<sup>106</sup> In the late fourteenth century, John Wycliffe worked at translating the psalms into English for their singing; however, he, too, was adamant that the music should never overshadow the lyrics. Despite this resistance to musical development, the fifteenth century would bring unprecedented innovation in

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>105</sup> As cited in Gant, *Sing unto the Lord*, 28.

<sup>106</sup> Gant, *Sing unto the Lord*, 142.

style and complexity in church music.<sup>107</sup> This development led to charges of musical elitism which would form part of the landscape of the Reformation.

The Reformation saw huge shifts in ecclesial forms. Although theomusicology generated debate and was probably influenced by the Reformation more than any other period in ecclesial history, it could not be called a core component of the controversies of the time. Rather, church music was dramatically impacted as a second order of effect by changes and challenges to the structures, liturgies, and ecclesiology which supported it.<sup>108</sup> When musing over the impact of the Reformation on theomusicology, Andrew Gant quotes Zhou Enlai: “It’s too early to tell.”<sup>109</sup>

By the Reformation period, worship music was thought by some to have become an “imposing concert of performance music”<sup>110</sup> in the communities who had the available resources and talent. As a reaction to the pressure of the Reformation, the Counter-Reformers generally forbade the use of secular music, insisting on the genre that had been carved out for the church in the previous productive century.<sup>111</sup> Erasmus of Rotterdam was sympathetic to the Reformers’ criticisms of the elitism of the church music genre; in 1519 he wrote that “modern church music is so constructed that the congregation cannot hear one distinct word. The choristers themselves do not understand what they are singing, yet according to priests and monks it constitutes the whole of

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 30-37.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 55-56. Gant claims the accuracy of this quote is questionable; it is quite possibly instead a response by Zhou Enlai when he was asked about long-term impact of the French Revolution.

<sup>110</sup> James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993), Digital Edition: Chapter 4, “Church Music,” Paragraph 2.

<sup>111</sup> Evans, *Open Up the Doors*, 31.

religion.”<sup>112</sup> Voices from both sides of the argument seemed to agree that the existing form of church music was problematic.

Although music was not at the intellectual core of the Reformation, the Reformers still had radical views on how to harness its power. Zwingli, arguably the best musician of the Reformers, not only eliminated music and singing from worship but ordered the destruction of countless pipe organs.<sup>113</sup> Calvin allowed only the human voice singing in unison.<sup>114</sup> These traditions and views still distinctly influence some denominations 500 years later, such as the Free Church of Scotland where singing psalms *a cappella*, or ‘in the style of the chapel,’ is the only accepted musical liturgical expression.

Martin Luther’s view on music stood out from many of his contemporaries; rather than restrict the use of music, he sought to introduce more accessible songs. This selection from a letter from Luther to George Spalatin in 1524 clarifies his position:

Our plan is to follow the example of the prophets and the ancient fathers of the Church, and to compose psalms for the people in the vernacular, that is, spiritual songs, so the Word of God may be among the people in the form of music.<sup>115</sup>

Using Philippians 2:6-11 and Ephesians 5:18-19 as his guiding texts, Luther thought music, like Scripture, was more pedagogically effective if it was in a language people could understand.

For Luther, very much like Tillich, education in cultural pursuits was Christians’ duty in order to discern divine revelation in the dominant culture. Christians are freed

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<sup>112</sup> Gant, *Sing unto the Lord*, 63.

<sup>113</sup> White, *Christian Worship*, Chapter 4, “Church Music,” Paragraph 4.

<sup>114</sup> Evans, *Open Up the Doors*, 31.

<sup>115</sup> Helmut T. Lehmann, ed. *Luther's Works*, vol. 49 (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1972), 68-69. A reference to the ᾠδαὶ πνευματικαῖς of Eph 5:19 and Col 3:16, which will be discussed again later.

from estrangement from God; the culture in which Christians exist, though corrupted, becomes the place where God is perpetually encountered. “Music,” said Luther, “is a noble gift of God, next to theology. I would not change my little knowledge of music for a great deal.”<sup>116</sup> Luther affirmed that culture was the sphere in which Christ could and ought be followed. Our drive to do good works comes from God; the content of these works comes from human culture. In the realm of church music, Luther accomplished this not only by writing original hymns, but also by creating parodies of secular songs called ‘contrafacta.’<sup>117</sup> Despite the widely popular urban legend, there is no evidence of contrafacta based specifically on drinking songs; instead, Luther used popular songs from everyday life, much like the Bishop of Ossory centuries before.<sup>118</sup>

The post-Reformation period saw a short burst of instability in English church music due to the difference in the ecclesiologies of the Tudor heirs. After a lot of turmoil, Elizabeth I was a stabilizing force not least because of her longevity, but also because of her desire to find a ‘middle way’ for English church music. Gant declares that Elizabeth I

saved church music... [she] is writing with good and evil angels balanced on either shoulder, one urging her to indulge her love of what she calls “the laudable science of music”, the other reining in her enthusiasm with an appeal to reason and restraint. When one gets a “modest distinct song”, the other gets a “delight in music”; one gets “the best sort of music”, the other gets the words “plainly understood”.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> As cited by Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 174-175.

<sup>117</sup> Robert Falck and Martin Picker, “Contrafactum,” *Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University, 2006), accessed February 7, 2019, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/06361>. This is the plural of the Latin term ‘contrafactum.’

<sup>118</sup> Evans, *Open Up the Doors*, 30, 185.

<sup>119</sup> Gant, *Sing unto the Lord*, 105-106.



The notations made by John Marbeck to the Book of Common Prayer during this time remain in use today; Gant writes that “because it began life as an adaptation of existing music to new circumstances, it lent itself readily to further adaptation when later ages rewrote the words in their own image.”<sup>120</sup> This helped prepare for another significant shift that would impact theomusicological thinking; rather than music being passively consumed, in the 1570s congregational singing came into style and popularity.

As congregational singing spread throughout the church into the early seventeenth century, smaller churches moved toward using tunes that were in the common musical vernacular.<sup>121</sup> They were short, easy to learn, and in the range of the average person. This led to the development of an adaptable folk-song-type hymnody. One of the more prolific authors of this kind of hymn was Charles Wesley, who wrote more than 6000 hymns as well as another 3000 poems of which many were set to music after his death. With an ear for the meter and tactus of the music, Wesley was known to borrow, adapt, and parody well-known existing tunes. For example, “Love Devine, All Loves Excelling” comes from the meter of Dryden’s *King Arthur*; sing along: “Fairest isle, all isles excelling / Seat of pleasure and of love / Venus here will choose her dwelling / And forsake her Cyprian grove.” Later, the words would be set to the music ‘Blaenwern,’ which, if you sang, was most likely the tune you were singing. This became common practice over the next couple centuries, through a variety of musicians like Wesley and lyricists like Isaac Watts, who is said to be the standard-setter for modern congregational hymn singing.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 121, 170-171.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 248, 263-264.

It is here where hymnody becomes developmentally arrested and many hymn writers begin striving to capture a timeless traditional folk sound which belonged to a previous era. Thomas Helmore is perhaps the most important musical reformer of the nineteenth century; at the end of his life he expressed regret that he and his colleagues were guilty of “over-dosing the ancient.”<sup>123</sup> The gradual modernization of the old favourites continues as it has for a millennium, but hymn-writers continue to intentionally write music to sound like the tunes of a past era. Some of the traditional hymns sung in the church are contemporized versions of the originals, both lyrically and musically. The version of “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” that many churches sing is actually an early twentieth-century rendition reflecting the militarized melodies of the other hymns of the era; we might not even recognize the original which is rhythmically much smoother.<sup>124</sup>

The arguments over what music is liturgically acceptable continued into the twentieth century and beyond. As late as 1903, anti-modernist Pope Pius X banned the piano as unfit for use in worship.<sup>125</sup> The fear of the power of music is entirely logical. Popular culture and its music do seem like a wide-open highway to hell. Early in Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, the demonic narrator asks: “Who am I? Let’s put it this way: who has the best tunes?”<sup>126</sup> The evil one knows the power of music, and yet secular music is so often steeped in a kind of spirituality that invites the church to dive in; after all, the church has the protection of the name of Jesus and it is called, like the apostles, to

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>124</sup> Liesch, *New Worship*, 34.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 203. Many churches have a surplus of pianos serving as coffee tables and shelving.

<sup>126</sup> Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses: A Novel* (Toronto, ON: Vintage, 1988), 10.

go and cast out demons in that name.<sup>127</sup> The attempt to protect or isolate ecclesial structures has only flaunted the kind of hypocrisy which Jesus calls out. It is better to pray like the tax collector and own our sin than to point at all the punk rockers and thank God for not being like them.<sup>128</sup> As will be seen later in this chapter, rock music is drenched in religious imagery and is an effective spiritual tool. As Larry Norman asked, “Why should the Devil have all the good music?”<sup>129</sup>

*Sacred Rock Music: The Priesthood of All Headbangers*

They say heaven's a place, yeah heaven's a place and they know where it is  
 But you know where it is? It's behind the gate they won't let you in  
 When they hear the beat coming from the street they lock the door  
 But if there's no music up in heaven then what's it for?  
 When I hear the beat, the Spirit's on me like a live-wire  
 A thousand horses running wild in a city on fire  
 Arcade Fire, “Here Comes the Night Time,” from *Reflektor*, 2013

Many early theologians sought to limit or ban music partly because of its ability to elicit physically-manifested emotions. Music produces physiological reactions. Music

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<sup>127</sup> 2 Thes 3:3; Mk 3:15.

<sup>128</sup> Lk 18:9-14.

<sup>129</sup> Larry Norman, “Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music?,” track 9 from *Only Visiting This Planet* (London, UK: Verve Records, 1972).

brings you places where you did not necessarily desire or plan to go. Music is the expression of the heart's desire. Music moves.

Music draws us into liminal states of being. Michael Gilmour writes that “there is something transcendent, mystical, and even primal, about music at its best.”<sup>130</sup> Mine Dogantan-Dack writes that “the aesthetic impact and power of a musical performance lies in its capacity to intensify the attention of the listeners and their consciousness of the present moment by de-automatizing their relationship to the music.”<sup>131</sup> This de-automatization is a key to accessing a contemporary people seeking authenticity with a Gospel that seeks to realign relationships. The paschal mystery which is at the heart of the Gospel transcends intellectual and emotional lines. The church's mission is to deliver this message to a people entrenched in a culture that is buffered and estranged from this transcendence.<sup>132</sup>

In “Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship,” the published report of the 2007 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the opening paragraph notes pointedly: “God has bestowed upon his people the gift of song. God dwells within each human person, in the place where music takes its source.”<sup>133</sup> John Bell has said that the eleventh commandment, introduced later by David in six different psalms, is: “Sing a new song!”<sup>134</sup> Sociologists have agreed that across cultures, music is able to inspire and

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<sup>130</sup> Gilmour, *Gods and Guitars*, 6.

<sup>131</sup> As cited by Lim and Ruth, *Lovin' on Jesus*, 72.

<sup>132</sup> Kathleen Harmon, *The Ministry of Music*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2016), 10.

<sup>133</sup> “Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship,” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007, <https://www.yakimadiocese.org/pdf/SingToTheLord.pdf> Section 1.1, citing 1 Cor 3:16-17.

<sup>134</sup> As cited by Harding, “To Sing or Not,” 195.

facilitate prayerfulness.<sup>135</sup> Robert Jourdain talks about how contemporary music can tap into a common understanding of balancing ourselves and our outlook:

Music idealizes emotions negative and positive alike. By so doing it momentarily perfects our individual emotional lives... music imparts dignity to experience that often is far from dignified. And by imparting pleasure even to negative emotions, music serves to justify sufferings large and small, assuring us that it has not all been for nothing.<sup>136</sup>

Music is an ideal vehicle for de-automatizing people's estranged sacred-secular understanding and relationships.

One of the better criticisms of rock music in church is that it seems to turn worship into a performance. The tension between 'performer'/praise team and 'audience'/congregation causes a lot of discomfort in academics, clergy, and laity alike.<sup>137</sup> When the performers themselves become the object of adoration, then worship can become idolatrous.<sup>138</sup> The danger here, to borrow from Buddhist thought, is that the finger that points to the moon is not the moon.<sup>139</sup> In the case of powerful and emotive music, the thing that points to the divine can be difficult to look past for some, especially when we consider the way that rock concerts seem to encourage idolatrous performer-worship.

For those churches where a band has replaced a choir, and where Christian Contemporary Music [CCM] is the primary or only genre that is played, the sanctuary

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<sup>135</sup> Amy D. McDowell, "'Christian But Not Religious': Being Church as Christian Hardcore Punk," *Sociology of Religion* 79, no. 1 (2018): "Music as Church," Paragraph 1, doi:10.1093/socrel/srx033; Wuthnow, *All in Sync*, 76.

<sup>136</sup> As cited in Brian Wren, *Praying Twice: The Music and Words of Congregational Song* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 2000), 65.

<sup>137</sup> Evans, *Open Up the Doors*, 14.

<sup>138</sup> Liesch, *New Worship*, 163-164.

<sup>139</sup> Chien-Hsing Ho, "The Finger Pointing Toward the Moon: A Philosophical Analysis of the Chinese Buddhist Thought of Reference," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 35, no. 1 (2008): 160.

may more closely resemble a rock concert than a traditional church service.<sup>140</sup> These churches have fully embraced that music is one of the most powerful tools for both creating communal unity and for making real the divine presence.<sup>141</sup> Some have achieved the often-pejorative status of ‘megachurch’ where the music requires massive amplification systems and complex sound staging to accommodate the needs of the large number of worshippers.<sup>142</sup> Their approach to worship music marks their identity more than creeds, doctrines, or church programming.<sup>143</sup> The focus is on the mediation of God's presence through the symbolic expression of music. For these churches, “music is sacramental. The language used to describe it is often as stark and highly charged as medieval eucharistic theology: Sung praise ushers worshippers into God's presence (we might almost add *ex opere operato*).”<sup>144</sup> These ecclesial expressions have created a priestly class out of their rock bands.<sup>145</sup> Poignant criticism mounted against the music of these megachurches discounts it as being overly simplistic, but its ability to attract large numbers of young adults warrants investigation.<sup>146</sup>

As was discussed in the previous section, there is a long history of church music being less participatory than it has been in the last century. The participation of the congregation for most of church history was their enjoyment of the complex

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<sup>140</sup> John D. Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows into Christian Practice* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 257.

<sup>141</sup> McDowell, “Christian But Not Religious,” “Music as Church,” Paragraph 1.

<sup>142</sup> Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, 258-9.

<sup>143</sup> Marva J. Dawn, *A Royal “Waste” of Time: The Splendor of Worshiping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 284.

<sup>144</sup> Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, 255. The sacrality does not come from the worship leaders, but from the Source to which they point; therefore, the efficacy should stem from the same place.

<sup>145</sup> Evans, *Open Up the Doors*, 14.

<sup>146</sup> Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, 257.

compositions and performances. Theomusicologist Mark Evans writes that “there was nothing for the humble attendee to do in corporate worship other than to watch, listen, and pray.”<sup>147</sup> The movement toward liturgical participation is a hallmark of the Reformation, but even simple listening to music is interactive. The experience of music works our intellects and our memories. Popular music works through the common vernacular of anticipation, resolution, repetition, and expectation; untrained listeners understand accurately what is happening even when they find it difficult to mimic.<sup>148</sup>

Other aspects of the liturgy are uncontroversially and incontrovertibly non-participatory, such as the common unidirectional delivery of sermons. Liesch writes that “the concert format – where a soloist, specialized group, or choir performs mono-directionally to an audience – corresponds closely to the pastor's format.”<sup>149</sup> There is currently room made in most liturgies for participatory music and also for performance pieces.<sup>150</sup> Performance is not the antithesis of worship; Kierkegaard notes

in regard to things spiritual, the foolishness of many is this, that they in the secular sense look upon the speaker as an actor, and the listeners as theatergoers who are to pass judgment upon the artist. But the speaker is not the actor – not in the remotest sense. No, the speaker is the prompter. There are no mere theatergoers present, for each listener will be looking into his [*sic*] own heart.<sup>151</sup>

Although our secular sensibility sees a performance, the true performers are the individuals brought together with those who would, by grace, be prompted toward God,

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<sup>147</sup> Evans, *Open Up the Doors*, 28.

<sup>148</sup> Wren, *Praying Twice*, 62.

<sup>149</sup> Liesch, *New Worship*, 164.

<sup>150</sup> Polman, “Praise the Name,” “Introduction,” Paragraph 5.

<sup>151</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing*, trans. by Douglas V. Steere (New York, NY: Harper, 1938), accessed November 20, 2012, Religion Online, <http://www.religion-online.org/showbook.asp?title=2523>, Chapter 12, Paragraph 4.

who is the actual audience. The Second Vatican Council declares “the basic level of such [worship] participation is putting one's body into the assembly where the liturgy is being celebrated.”<sup>152</sup> Showing up is the foundation of participation. If this is the case, it is better to have a performance-oriented liturgy that fills the church than a sparsely-attended participatory one. Greater numbers are not the end goal, of course; ontological encounter which deepens relationship with the Christ is the objective. Small Christian gatherings can be very effective, but when subfuscous forms turn people off, there is a critical problem.

The fact that contemporary rock used in worship seems performance-oriented suggests that it might be actually tapping into the ancient tradition of priestly worship. In many of the churches where contemporary music guides the worship, the band serves as liturgists.<sup>153</sup> Barbara Bagnall writes that “instead of priests and altar boys, the focus of attention is a rock band, usually several musicians and singers who pump out music with catchy rhythms and romantic tug of good pop.”<sup>154</sup> The Second Vatican Council recognizes the charism of certain believers – that some are bestowed with certain gifts with which to serve God, and these gifts are varied such that they go beyond the biblically defined ‘spiritual gifts.’<sup>155</sup> These believers are encouraged to use their charism in God's service; for some, this gift is the ability to play rock music.

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<sup>152</sup> Frank C. Senn, *Introduction to Christian Liturgy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2012), 189.

<sup>153</sup> Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, 253-254.

<sup>154</sup> As cited in Evans, *Open Up the Doors*, 14.

<sup>155</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 408; cf. Rom 12:6-8, 1 Cor 12:8-12, 1 Pet 4:11.



The glaring problem with using the priestly model to understand contemporary worship is that it upholds the stance of priests as mediators between the people and God – a stance the Reformation handily rejected.<sup>156</sup> The arguments for contemporary rock in the church thus far rely heavily on the innovations of pioneer Reformers like Luther in bringing the message to the people using the common vernacular. The two views do not need to be held in tension. In practice, most churches in the Reformed tradition still maintain sacerdotal roles, at very least for presiding over the sacraments. Recall Kierkegaard's observation: we may be tempted to see this as hierarchical, but the priestly role is not to act-on-behalf; it is to prompt the congregation to engage with the real initiator and audience – the Alpha and Omega Creator. Harmonizing the concept of the priestly musician with the innovations of the Reformation requires constant reminding that priestly music is about God and not about the musicians. When the focus becomes how well the band performed, then worshipful praise and spiritual formation can become dangerously secondary and potentially idolatrous.<sup>157</sup>

The vacuum left by the lack of contemporary church music has been filled by the genre of CCM, offering the best and the worst of liturgically-inspired art. The genre is form-driven, designed to be singable in a way that much of contemporary music is not. The content is often quite sparse with a lot of repetition and simplicity. It is vernacular, accessible, and relies upon the emotive character of slow chord progressions and loud, full dynamics to sweep up its listeners into an ecstatic state.<sup>158</sup> CCM bridges the gap

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<sup>156</sup> Avery Dulles, *The Priestly Office: A Theological Reflection* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1997), 1-2.

<sup>157</sup> Liesch, *New Worship*, 163-164.

<sup>158</sup> Kierkegaard's last words are alleged to be, "Sweep me up." Richard Linklater, *Waking Life* (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2001), digital video disc, Chapter 17.

between the liturgical efficacy and musical literacy for many contemporary people, as the musical vernacular is comprehensible to them. However, those with a traditional musical formation tend to loathe CCM. It is criticized as relying upon the emotive aesthetic at the cost of theological depth in both form and content. Based upon Tillich's theology of culture, though, what this might actually point toward is a loathing of contemporary forms rather than CCM in itself.

An openness to contemporary music could be the reason why evangelical churches are sometimes perceived as more vibrant and inviting, even when their doctrines are less radically welcoming. The music-led Hillsong Churches, which began in Australia and boast congregations in excess of 18,000, are CCM-driven and very popular with seekers and young adults.<sup>159</sup> People who enjoy this type of worship say it helps them move from a space of reserved rationality into a renewed experiential intimacy which has been compared to the movement from “the outer courts” into “the holy of holies.”<sup>160</sup> Researchers have found that for young adults it is the tunes of the traditional hymns which bother them more than the words.<sup>161</sup> If these churches are using music which speaks to people’s artistic formation, they will be perceived as a place where they more likely belong.

One of the reasons that churches resist vernacular music, in particular rock music, is that it is not generally designed for corporate singing. Many worship leaders know that new music can be received sometimes less-than-enthusiastically, so introducing

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<sup>159</sup> Tim Dowley, *Christian Music: A Global History* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2011), 239.

<sup>160</sup> Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, 255.

<sup>161</sup> Liesch, *New Worship*, 31.

selections that are more rhythmically complex can be daunting. It is true that rock music is the cultural vernacular and that unchurched people are more likely to feel comfortable with it, yet many congregational musicians feel proficient playing a little over 50 hymns, and few know more than 200.<sup>162</sup> Even if a church's mission includes saving group singing from a culture where it has almost completely disappeared, it might want to reflect on the possibility that the current congregational hymnological expressions might also be contributing to corporate singing's demise. As early as the nineteenth century, Robert Druitt said that "the surest method of all, to extinguish anything like singing, is to set up a grinding organ."<sup>163</sup> If any style of music is going to work, it is going to take practice, repetition, authentic desire, and attention to quality – not for the glory of the musicians, but to limit distractions from pointing toward the glory of God. Many advocates for contemporary music in the church agree it works best when it is done well.<sup>164</sup> This is not just limited to contemporary genres; poor performance of music of any genre kills congregational engagement.<sup>165</sup>

Composer Alice Parker suggests that popular culture dissipated by unidirectional technologies such as television has undermined congregational enjoyment and participation in music.<sup>166</sup> People's relationship with and consumption of music has vastly

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<sup>162</sup> Witvliet, John D., "Discipleship and the Future of Contemporary Worship Music: Possible Directions for Scholarship, Songwriting, and Public Worship," in *The Message in the Music: Studying Contemporary Praise and Worship*, eds. Robert Woods and Brian Walrath. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2007. Kindle Edition: "A Call to Worship Leaders and Pastors," Paragraph 2.

<sup>163</sup> Gant, *Sing unto the Lord*, 288.

<sup>164</sup> Jansen, "When the Music Fades," "Introduction," Paragraph 4.

<sup>165</sup> There are plenty of exceptions here, most notably the offer of poorly performed music by children. Perhaps the key element here is that music must be offered with an authentic orientation toward opening people to experience ecclesial values, such as building community, opening the heart to worship, or softening hearts to better ontologically encounter the Word.

<sup>166</sup> As cited by Wren, *Praying Twice*, 53.

changed and left the church behind. We have difficulty realizing that many children would rather engage with Katy Perry than the old favourite children's hymns or even Raffi.<sup>167</sup> If we do not wish to place a stumbling block in the little ones' paths,<sup>168</sup> then we must do our best to speak to them in a musical language they can understand rather than impose our own subjective preferences upon them. There should be some points that are fairly obvious, like agreeing that a children's hymn that talks about "chiding the billows"<sup>169</sup> is out of date. The church has stalled so long on modernizing its music that it is not the children who are primarily unsatisfied; among people under 55, the support for experimentation with progressive music styles is above 50 percent across all denominational groups.<sup>170</sup> Church cultures which have encouraged the bold musical innovators in their midst have typically been retrospectively looked upon as more in line with where the church was headed than those who were more restrictive.<sup>171</sup> As set out, continuing to use outdated forms is evidence of the prerequisite for a 'cultural circumcision' for participation in worship.

If unchurched people come to worship and do not feel a connection to the liturgical expressions, it will become much more difficult for them to see themselves as a part of the community. Worse, if they see that those who are entrenched in the community are themselves bored, then they will see the liturgical expressions as inauthentic, and therefore emotionally repressed and inherently false.<sup>172</sup> Gilmour writes, "there may be an

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<sup>167</sup> Monica Rosborough, personal communication, Atlantic School of Theology, February 2011.

<sup>168</sup> Lk 17:2.

<sup>169</sup> From verse 3 of the children's hymn "Tell Me the Stories of Jesus." Words by William H. Parker (1885).

<sup>170</sup> Wuthnow, *All in Sync*, 150-151.

<sup>171</sup> Evans, *Open Up the Doors*, 68-69.

<sup>172</sup> Root, *Faith Formation*, 7.

implied criticism here. Those who search for meaning without success may be calling attention to the insufficiency of divine revelation and / or the inability of God's people to communicate religious truth convincingly and clearly."<sup>173</sup> Resistance to ecclesial change is sometimes framed as defending the timeless nature of the Gospel, but when the idyllic forms are themselves not even a few centuries old, it is actually a certain point of history that is erroneously being heralded as 'timeless.'<sup>174</sup> The desire to hold onto their golden age firmly roots the UCC and other mainline denominations in the 1950s. Bradley, a member of a punk rock ministry, reflects:

Everybody was so freaked out by what happened in the 60s and early 70s in mainstream culture that the church tried to separate itself off as much as possible that any culture that is not the culture that we profess is bad and you need to stay away from it... I don't think the church was conscious of it happening. It stemmed from love but got tainted by fear. Everyone wanted the best for their kids so bad that they were just sheltering them.<sup>175</sup>

It is important when making judgements on the cultural expressions of a community that the purpose and mission of the community is considered. The 2007 report of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops "reiterates the three judgments – liturgical, pastoral, and musical – introduced... to guide our musical decision-making."<sup>176</sup> These are three good guides in music selection, but it also underscores that if the purpose of ecclesial culture is simply to self-replicate rather than inspire ontological encounter, then it has a serious problem.

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<sup>173</sup> Gilmour, *Gods and Guitars*, 51.

<sup>174</sup> Barbara Bagnall, "Celebration," in *Ordered Liberty: Readings in the History of United Church Worship*, ed. William S. Kervin (Toronto, ON: United Church, 2011), 230.

<sup>175</sup> As cited by McDowell, "Christian But Not Religious," "Reimagining Church," Paragraph 3.

<sup>176</sup> Harmon, *Ministry of Music*, 18.

The most influential composers of church music in the early twentieth century were inspired by the folk music of their time, leveraging its vernacularity and accessibility. Vaughn Williams continued the practice of setting church music to folk songs, sometimes slightly adapted such as with “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” Williams looked to the tunes sung in the fields and farms and attached words to them in order to harness the power of their familiarity.<sup>177</sup> The driving force of hymnody in this period was not musical modernism; however, the church music of this era was tied to its cultural space-time, which was neither closer to the biblical norm nor particularly relevant to our modern cultural context. This hymnody is a part of a collective memory of an era when the Canadian church was about to boom, but it has been largely ineffective at evangelizing the twenty-first-century unchurched and it has been dissonant with the cultural norms over the past five decades.<sup>178</sup> It is thought to be a pathway to authentic spirituality, but it is actually a longing for the kind of culture which was duty- and conformity-driven. It is laden with nostalgia for the golden age of traditional denominations, but it is not necessarily good for the kind of power-shunning religion which Jesus teaches.

On any given Sunday at any given UCC congregation, the music will likely be completely drawn from its published hymn books. The majority of the selections would most likely be from the older 1996 *Voices United* rather than its more modern, but still 12-year-old supplement *More Voices*. This style is different from anything you would

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<sup>177</sup> Gant, *Sing unto the Lord*, 245-246, 333, 337.

<sup>178</sup> “A person becomes neurotic because he cannot tolerate the amount of frustration with society imposed upon him in the service of cultural ideals.” Sigmund Freud, as cited in Root, *Faith Formation*, 41.

hear outside the church, even if it has been inspired by the same 1960s popular folk-based style that likewise inspired much of popular rock music. Church music and rock music share the same roots, but somewhere along the line an isolated and unique musical expression brought each in its own direction. Those brought up in the church have been formed by a distinct and isolated ‘church culture.’ Outsiders seeking religious experience within the church are expected to learn and be converted to this foreign culture. Seekers are expected to leave their symbols, language, and formation in the ‘inferior’ secular world. This is not to suggest that church music must sound exactly like popular music, but rather that in any church that claims to be radically welcoming, the purpose of the music must be understandable by those for whom contemporary forms are their vernacular. In fact, Tillich warns that the church should not inauthentically mimic popular art, but instead be aware of *why* it inspires and liberates the unchurched and seek to create authentic ecclesial art which likewise inspires and liberates.<sup>179</sup> If contemporary music overshadows church music in inspirational efficacy, reaching the unchurched using the latter becomes a greater challenge.

Some fear that divergence from traditional hymnody will compromise the possibility for authentic worship. There is no shortage of defensiveness and resistance toward new music in worship, let alone the introduction of new genres.<sup>180</sup> This is not surprising; people have a tendency to become hostile when it comes to the music they prefer or detest, partly because artistic taste is so emotionally and experientially

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<sup>179</sup> Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 48.

<sup>180</sup> Evans, *Open Up the Doors*, 12.

determined.<sup>181</sup> It is worth considering that this is as true for those outside the church as it is for those inside. If our mission is to evangelize the unchurched, it would make sense that we reduce the barriers imposed by ecclesially-derived forms. Tillich posits that ideally, “there is no sacred artistic style in Protestant... doctrine.”<sup>182</sup> To use ‘sacred’ to describe organ-led traditional hymnody and ‘secular’ for guitar-led contemporary rock succumbs to the kind of elitism which Jesus admonishes.<sup>183</sup> The admonition of contemporary forms forsakes the church's relevance and makes church music into a localized babble that is an obstacle to evangelizing those without previous instruction in it.

In *A Song of Faith*,<sup>184</sup> the most modern doctrinal document of the UCC, singing or music is mentioned 21 times,<sup>185</sup> though it was not mentioned at all in previous doctrinal documents or in the current version of *The Manual*.<sup>186</sup> The first and last reference to music in *A Song of Faith* are about the inability to restrain one's self from participation in the holy music: “We cannot keep from singing.”<sup>187</sup> Music is inherently useful at creating a space where beliefs are challenged and hearts are opened. It is one place where the transcendent is still largely expected to happen. Music facilitates ontological encounter. The radically welcoming church needs a theomusicology that is in harmony with its missiology.

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<sup>181</sup> Wren, *Praying Twice*, 67.

<sup>182</sup> Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 48.

<sup>183</sup> Evans, *Open Up the Doors*, 66-67.

<sup>184</sup> The United Church of Canada, “A Song of Faith.”

<sup>185</sup> A significant number, 7+7+7.

<sup>186</sup> The United Church of Canada, *The Manual 2019* (Toronto, ON: United Church, 2019).

[https://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/the-manual\\_2019.pdf](https://www.united-church.ca/sites/default/files/the-manual_2019.pdf)

<sup>187</sup> The United Church of Canada, “A Song of Faith,” Line 14, 310.



*Secular Spiritual Formation: Music for Lost Souls*

Because we separate, it ripples our reflections

Radiohead, “Reckoner,” from *In Rainbows*, 2007

Canadian culture has many idols which obscure faith and relationships. An attitude of entitlement intertwined with rampant individualism is celebrated, to the point where settling for less is seen as weakness. The father of modern economics, Adam Smith, posited that egocentricity and greed are deadly to our cultural health. Smith warned that the ‘Vile Maxim’ – “all for me and nothing for anyone else”<sup>188</sup> – would be the downfall of any system, including capitalism. The Vile Maxim seems alive and well in rock, where positive role models can be hard to find. The thought of a wholesome rock star seems disingenuous and dubious. Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Kurt Cobain, Jim Morrison, Amy Winehouse, and Brian Jones have set the bar very low – all were considered musical pioneers in the genre of rock, all openly flaunted and modelled insobriety, and all died at age 27. These rock gods, whose deaths are in no small part due to their consumption, are certainly not the kinds of role models churches want their Sunday school children to emulate.

Many consider rock a tool of the devil. Listen to “Stairway to Heaven” backwards and some claim you will hear satanic messages at the very point of the song which is

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<sup>188</sup> Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Edwin Cannan, ed. (London, UK: Methuen & Co., Ltd, 1904 [1776]), accessed June 3, 2016, Library of Economics and Liberty, <http://www.econlib.org/library/Smith/smWN.html>, III.4.10.

quoted at the beginning of this thesis.<sup>189</sup> AC/DC is downright conspicuous in flaunting wickedness; among their repertoire are songs entitled “Hell’s Bells,” “Hell Ain’t a Bad Place to Be,” and their 1979 hit album title track “Highway to Hell” which continues to receive frequent daytime radio airplay and was featured in the 2010 children's movie *Megamind*. Pastors have long warned congregations of the perverting influence rock music wields over suggestible youth and have urged homes be purged of this insidious evil. From the sexually connotative pelvic thrusts of Elvis Presley, to bands bold enough in their heathenism to call themselves Black Sabbath, the lascivious lifestyles of drug-addled rockers should convince all who love purity and righteousness that this genre and all associated with it can serve only malevolent ends.

A slim majority of Christians say they do not like rock music and do not want to experiment with new music styles.<sup>190</sup> Rock has more in common with noise than art for some. Calvin Johansson writes:

The music of rock supports the repudiation of biblical standards by using combinations of sounds which are violent, mind-numbing, vulgar, raw, mesmerizing, rebellious, grossly repetitive, uncreative, undisciplined, and chaotic sounding. If listeners do not hear these things, it is because rock has dulled their aesthetic sensibilities.<sup>191</sup>

This Calvin agrees with the Reformer known by the same cognomen – the Scriptures can only be honoured when they are not eclipsed by the din of certain “vulgar, raw, mesmerizing” music.

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<sup>189</sup> Roger Chapman, ed. *Encyclopedia of the Culture Wars: Issues, Voices, and Viewpoints* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2010), 246. The slurred words “Yes there are two roads” played backwards and heard with a generous dose of suggestion and imagination, can sound like “I am now Satan.”

<sup>190</sup> Wuthnow, *All in Sync*, 147-149, 220. This is considering all ages, where the previous statistics were only regarding people under 55.

<sup>191</sup> Calvin M. Johansson, *Discipling Music Ministry: Twenty-first Century Directions* (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 1992), 26.

Time magazine's 'best living theologian' Stanley Hauerwas recently declared that contemporary worship (which he pejoratively compares to 'worship' with no qualifier) is ugly, superficial, and ignores the terror and suffering of the world around us.<sup>192</sup> Pope Benedict XVI was explicitly against rock music, writing that it

is the expression of elemental passions, and at rock festivals it assumes a cultic character, a form of worship, in fact, in opposition to Christian worship. People are, so to speak, released from themselves by the experience of being part of a crowd and by the emotional shock of rhythm, noise, and special lighting effects. However, in the ecstasy of having all their defenses torn down, the participants sink, as it were, beneath the elemental forces of the universe.<sup>193</sup>

It is difficult to discern here exactly what he means by "sinking beneath the elemental forces of the universe," but AC/DC could probably help determine what eternal direction he feels that the concert-goers are heading. Rock music used in church has been criticized as "merely entertainment, treating worshipers like consumers – giving them what they want musically rather than what they need spiritually, relying on manipulation of emotions rather than the movement of the Holy Spirit."<sup>194</sup> More radical sources have put it more poignantly: "Woe to the church that brings in the worldly beat to its worship services and caters to the fleshly desires... let us put off the 'old man' with its evil rock music, and put on the 'new man' with its melodious good music."<sup>195</sup> The fact that some

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<sup>192</sup> The Work of the People, "Sunday Asylum with Stanley Hauerwas: Contemporary Worship Vs. Worship," interview, n. d., accessed April 12, 2019, <http://www.theworkofthepeople.com/contemporary-worship-vs-worship>. To be clear, I agree with Time's assessment that Hauerwas is the best living theologian.

<sup>193</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *The Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 2000), 148.

<sup>194</sup> Robert Woods and Brian Walrath, "Introduction," in *The Message in the Music: Studying Contemporary Praise and Worship*, eds. Robert Woods and Brian Walrath (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2007), Kindle Edition: Introduction, "The Good, Bad, and Ugly of CWM," Paragraph 5.

<sup>195</sup> Frederick, *Christian Rock Music*, 57-58.

find rock music jarring and vulgar is not a revelation. A lot of popular rock music can be lyrically perverse and frequently sexist, but public opinion confirms people generally find it sonically beautiful and engaging.<sup>196</sup> Christian Scharen challenges theologians:

If hundreds of thousands of people are buying songs or seeing movies or watching a show on TV, it is worth asking what they are finding there that is meaningful, and how they are being shaped by their attention: how does such and such help them to see the world in a certain way?... One can actually know something profound from the experience of simply seeing, hearing, truly attending. Such freedom comes, one might say, in the freedom that comes from faith in a God whose judgment and mercy take us out of our selfishness and restore us to a community of self-giving and love.<sup>197</sup>

It has already been established that music is useful in drawing people into a liminal state where preconceptions can be challenged. Tom Beaudoin notes that “popular music is far from simple entertainment. Music is a force that can be a way of being trained to succumb to the history of exploitation and / or of being able to invent new forms of freedom.”<sup>198</sup> The implication here is that rock music's capacity to either imprison or liberate lies in how theology intersects with it, which means the church's engagement is utterly critical.

The context and spirit in which a song is presented can make all the difference. Depeche Mode's “Personal Jesus” was written by Martin Gore, a proclaimed atheist, to describe the way intimate relationships can become disastrously idolatrous.<sup>199</sup> The lyrics

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<sup>196</sup> Mark Judge, *A Tremor of Bliss: Sex, Catholicism, and Rock 'n' Roll* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2010), 101.

<sup>197</sup> Christian Scharen, *Broken Hallelujahs: Why Popular Music Matters to Those Seeking God* (Grand Rapids, IL: Brazos, 2011), 121, 129.

<sup>198</sup> Tom Beaudoin, “Introduction: Theology of Popular Music as a Theological Exercise,” in *Secular Music and Sacred Theology*, ed. Tom Beaudoin (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2013), xii.

<sup>199</sup> Marissa Fox, “Pop a la Mode,” *Spin*, July, 1990, Paragraphs 25-27.

are so ambiguous, though, that when sung by professed Christian Johnny Cash,<sup>200</sup> it sounds like a spiritual invitation to be Christ for each other. Similarly, Cash covered Nine Inch Nails'<sup>201</sup> song "Hurt," but by simply changing the lyric "crown of shit" to "crown of thorns," the whole meaning of the song is changed. As was proffered in the section on church history, parodies are not new, but William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, was particularly adamant about their effectiveness. Booth wrote Christian parodies of dance-hall and popular music, despite his initial hesitancy and suspicion: he declared "I rather enjoy robbing the devil of his choicest tunes... it is like taking the enemy's guns and turning them against him."<sup>202</sup> Cash, Booth, and others have given good examples of effective use of the secular and even the explicitly anti-religious for Christian purposes.

Music's status as a foundational part of people's identity should not be underestimated. This is perhaps most evident in fans of less mainstream groups, such as heavy metal and punk. In countries like India, China, and Iran, fans of these genres are even loyal against extreme state, family, and social pressures.<sup>203</sup> In part this has to do with contemporary people's belief that artists "are people on the right path, moving toward enlightenment, who will help them find that indefinable *it* they so desperately seek."<sup>204</sup> In the age of authenticity, people see music as an effective tool for accessing the transcendent and will follow its leadings beyond rationality. This harks far back in

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<sup>200</sup> Dave Urbanski, *The Man Comes Around: The Spiritual Journey of Johnny Cash* (Lake Mary, FL: Relevant, 2003), xvii.

<sup>201</sup> Anecdotally, the name of the band was chosen by frontman Trent Reznor as an anti-Christian reference to the nails used to crucify Jesus. Interestingly enough, Reznor's later albums would be drenched in positive spiritual imagery. Lyrical evidence of this transformation will be presented in the next chapter.

<sup>202</sup> As cited in Dowley, *Christian Music*, 173.

<sup>203</sup> Gilmour, *Gods and Guitars*, 20.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 3. Italics original.

history; for the ancient Jews, all music was considered inherently religious, whether in worship settings or in the public sphere.<sup>205</sup> There was no such thing as ‘secular’ music *per se*. Even today, the use of religious language in music, either in a constructive or critical way, lends it to being “a vehicle to articulate deep desire: the longing to have what is beyond our reach; to know what is beyond our ken; to express the inexpressible.”<sup>206</sup>

When it comes to inspiring consideration of the prophetic and transcendent, Don Saliers suggests that the music outside the church is often more effective than that within.<sup>207</sup>

It is this sacrality in popular music that inspired this research over the past decade.

In a 2012 paper, the writer of this thesis shared

When I close my eyes and blast “There There” by Radiohead, I can feel my spirit wresting free from its mortal cage seeking resynchronization with its Creator. The tribal rhythm, the overlapping polyphonic vocals, the melancholic melodies reassuring me that it is okay to not be okay – it speaks to me in a way the musical offerings of the church's hymnals have not... When I need comfort, I crank up Nirvana.<sup>208</sup>

Root shares a similar experience, suggesting in part that ritual and tradition are behind people’s experience of music – the very same aspects which have created such an entrenched theomusicality within the church walls. He writes: “Hearing Nirvana again, I’m taken back, but also taken deep, searching for the meaning of my experience.

Hearing Kurt’s whining vocals and left-handed riffs, I can touch and taste again my transformations.”<sup>209</sup> David Nantais adds that

especially for those who have been brought up listening to it, rock music can take people

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<sup>205</sup> Alfevev, *Orthodox Christianity*, 251.

<sup>206</sup> Gilmour, *Gods and Guitars*, 6.

<sup>207</sup> Don E. Saliers, *Music and Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2007), 60-61.

<sup>208</sup> J. K. Nisbet Gale, “OMG Rock!: Rock Music in Worship” (master’s essay, Atlantic School of Theology, 2012).

<sup>209</sup> Root, *Faith Formation*, 153.

more deeply within themselves to reflect on their lives, relationships, the world, and God. Once this happens, we are better able to see the ways our lives are ordered toward or away from God. We are then more able to choose what is most important to hang onto in life and what it is that we can let go of in order to be more liberated.<sup>210</sup>

These are all voices from within the church; many more unheard songs have been blasted from the car radios on the highway to hell, possibly causing people to miss the exit to the stairway to heaven due to the dismissal and disdain of those already on the off-ramps.

The majority of people report that listening to music has been important to the development of their faith regardless of their musical preference.<sup>211</sup> Although there certainly exist many less-than-wholesome examples of rock music, rock traces its roots back to church music through blues music.<sup>212</sup> Scharen agrees that the sound and form of organ gospels can be clearly found in rock music.<sup>213</sup> It should not be so surprising, then, that the genre is replete with religious themes and imagery. Gilmour writes that popular rock music lyrics “offer a world of compelling texts rich with religious speculation. It is an art form easily overlooked by both the academy and organized religion as a site of serious spiritual reflection.”<sup>214</sup> He suggests that the unique way that music is now being consumed – widely available online but often listened to individually – has made it a tremendous tool for spiritual reflection and introspection. Don Compier agrees; although he prefers rock, he says the same vision applies to all popular genres: “For good and for bad, our music expresses our human, indeed, all-too-human, realities. Though glimpses

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<sup>210</sup> David Nantais, *Rock-a My Soul: An Invitation to Rock Your Religion* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2011), 59-60.

<sup>211</sup> Wuthnow, *All in Sync*, 69.

<sup>212</sup> Nantais, *Rock-a My Soul*, 13.

<sup>213</sup> Scharen, *Broken Hallelujahs*, 54-59.

<sup>214</sup> Gilmour, *Gods and Guitars*, 157.

of hope always shine through, it mirrors our fallen condition... Those who have ears to hear pick up clear signs of the work of the Spirit in all kinds of popular music.”<sup>215</sup>

Although rock in the age of authenticity has at times marked itself as an epicenter of disestablishmentarianism, there are simply too many spiritual themes and uses of religious language for it to be coincidental.

Even songs which seem heretical on the surface can sometimes contain profound theological statements, both intentional and accidental. As Tillich’s conversionist framework asserts, the secular belongs to God and is more infused with the Spirit than we often realize. Hart shares an idea about the pervasiveness of the spiritual:

Human awareness of finitude, freedom, creativity, and hope, for example, as publicly available experiences which may be appealed to as an indication that the substance of theology, far from being esoteric and inaccessible, is actually rooted in basic elements of human existence to which all may turn reflectively who choose to do so. Such features of our common existence, while they may not be experienced as 'religious' by those with no religious faith, are nonetheless there to be experienced by them, and may be identified as closely bound up with the concerns of faith and theology.<sup>216</sup>

Much of the transformative music of the 1960s spoke of the value of love, even when the musicians' actions were hedonistic and destructive.<sup>217</sup> There is an embedded spirituality in the lyrics of many secular songs, albeit it is sometimes hidden or misguided.

Although many people have left the church, often the desire for spiritual fulfillment has not waned. In fact, for some, the decision to leave the church was on the basis of not being spiritually fulfilled and suspecting inauthentic expressions in the

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<sup>215</sup> Compier, *Listening to Popular Music*, 116.

<sup>216</sup> Hart, *Faith Thinking*, 79.

<sup>217</sup> Judge, *Tremor of Bliss*, 101. Certainly, rock musicians do not own the copyright on hypocritical actions.



liturgical offerings. However, when discussing relationships with certain bands and particular albums, the language of transcendence and spirituality becomes sometimes necessary to express what is being experienced.<sup>218</sup> Robin Sylvan writes that

right under our noses, a significant religious phenomenon is taking place, one which constitutes an important development in the Western religious and cultural landscape. Yet, because conventional wisdom has taught us to regard popular music as trivial forms of secular entertainment, these religious dimensions remain hidden from view, marginalized and misunderstood.<sup>219</sup>

The reciprocal reaction has been increased levels of distrust in between people seeking authenticity and the institutional church, and CCM has not always helped. The vague lyrics in popular music has given it a more spiritual flavour, whereas the simplistic theology in CCM has made the unchurched and the ecclesially-entrenched alike cringe. The praise-filled choruses of CCM end up sounding like saccharine kitsch when played next to Pink Floyd.<sup>220</sup> Some defend this as speaking to the broadest possible audience, while others are critical of oversimplifying the Gospel in the wrong ways. Kathleen Harmon offers a cutting critique: “A diet of simplistic music will ultimately condemn the people to a shallow and immature spirituality.”<sup>221</sup> The church has its mission, and it must constantly reassess and review its forms, its language, and its liturgies in order to be sure its practices are in line with its missiology. Something in rock speaks to lost souls; it is

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<sup>218</sup> Gilmour, *Gods and Guitars*, 30.

<sup>219</sup> Robin Sylvan, *Traces of the Spirit: The Religious Dimensions of Popular Music* (New York, NY: New York University, 2002), 3.

<sup>220</sup> Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, 257; Evans, *Open Up the Doors*, 12-13. Both resources used use word ‘kitsch’ when discussing CCM, the prior defensively and the latter accusingly.

<sup>221</sup> Harmon, *Ministry of Music*, 20.

the mission of the church to help them find the Rock on which to build their eternal hopes.

*He is Risen: Christiformative Ontological Encounter*

He floated back down because he wanted to share  
His key to the locks on the chains he saw everywhere  
But first he was stripped and then he was stabbed  
By faceless men, well, fuckers, he still stands  
And he still gives his love, he just gives it away  
The love he receives is the love that is saved  
Pearl Jam, "Given to Fly," from *Yield*, 1998

The Canadian cultural predisposition for the rational and natural has made the earnest consideration of the supernatural on its own account seem contrived. People are suspicious of miracles or religious experiences. In the age of authenticity, people do not necessarily want cultural re-enchantment, as it also comes with unwanted superstitions and is susceptible to manipulation by coercive human power. Even in times of vulnerability, the promulgation of anything beyond what can be touched and seen is received with distrust. The dominant narrative as shown through mass media have cut away transcendence and made religion about a commitment and conformity to a litmus

test of explicable ideologies and an inflexible adherence to a prescribed doctrine.<sup>222</sup> The miraculous is relegated to the mystics and palm-readers where it can be safely discounted as trite entertainment.

There is not a lot of room for encounter with a living, breathing, resurrected Christ without an openness to transcendence. Conformity and compliance work institutionally, but they overshadow the transcendent divine *something* that is at the heart of spirituality. Breaking down institutional boundaries and rigid definitions continues to inspire musicians and music fans. Gilmour notes that

through popular music, many catch glimpses of something transcendent, something bigger than themselves that approximates an encounter with a spiritual Other. When artists and fans attempt to explain their encounters with *it*,... they typically turn to the reservoir of language and imagery available to them from traditional religious discourse to articulate the experience.<sup>223</sup>

This is the realm where good theology needs to speak, as without it, it becomes easy for a self-made and self-ascribed religious outlook to simply point back inward. The Gospel challenges the dominant values of individualism and self-sufficiency which can obfuscate the transcendent *it* for those who are searching. Thousands of years of Christian thought offer many well-formed articulations of transcendent experience, even if Christ's Body is covered in warts and bruises. The shepherd continues to call in the lost sheep, and it is the flock's stated mission to welcome those outside the doors in with open arms.<sup>224</sup>

Tragically, popular music has done a better job than the church at creating opportunities for transcendence. Popular hymnody does not achieve the complexity,

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<sup>222</sup> Root, *Faith Formation*, 5, 92.

<sup>223</sup> Gilmour, *Gods and Guitars*, 154-155.

<sup>224</sup> Lk 15:3-7.

authenticity, and depth of bands like Radiohead, Pink Floyd, and Arcade Fire. The words in Rushdie's modern retelling of Orpheus speak clearly to the tremendous missiological potential of rock music:

Wherein lies the power of songs?... Maybe we are just creatures in search of exaltation. We don't have much of it. Our lives are not what we deserve; they are, let us agree, in many painful ways deficient. Song turns them into something else. Song shows us a world that is worthy of our yearning, it shows us our selves as they might be, if we were worthy of the world.<sup>225</sup>

Saliers agrees that any time popular music sings of injustice, suffering, or the paradox of beauty in a world of hurt, it is always theological.<sup>226</sup> For those who are unsatisfied with the church's theological teachings on transcendence, there are a copious variety of popular songs which deeply explore the subject.

The role of music in the church, then, is not adherence to a particular genre for that genre's own sake, but the enactment of the paschal mystery, the Gospel which it is the church's mission to share.<sup>227</sup> Any music that helps people surrender to the transcendence of God's action in the midst of injustice and suffering, or that points toward the paradox of beauty in the midst of hurt, is the kind of music which might enliven the paschal mystery in its hearers. Music helps us to rethink our norms and question the dominant culture's motives.<sup>228</sup> When we make our own satisfaction the goal of worship, we have lost the Christiformative goal of the liturgy. If secular culture idolizes rock 'gods,' then the church should equip people to recognize and reorient this

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<sup>225</sup> Salman Rushdie, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet: A Novel* (Toronto, ON: Vintage, 1999), 19-20.

<sup>226</sup> Saliers, *Music and Theology*, x.

<sup>227</sup> Harmon, *Ministry of Music*, 8.

<sup>228</sup> Harding, "To Sing or Not," 191.

behaviour. The church can even do good things with forms and styles that have been used for unholy purposes.<sup>229</sup> Tanner writes that “Christian social practices construct a moral code in which many pagan virtues are wrested from their usual philosophical context and set in a religious one, in which they are weaned from their associations with virtuoso achievement and made into an ideal to which all may aspire by God's grace.”<sup>230</sup> The conversion of the unholy into the holy in and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus has always been the substance of the church’s truth, life, and way.

In *Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s position is that charismatic evangelicals have turned Jesus from a transcendent person to be encountered into a countercultural idea to which to subscribe.<sup>231</sup> Root suggests this brand of counterculturalism was perfected in the church alongside the hippie movement, which itself sought freedom through ideology. He writes that in evangelical churches in the 1960s

Jesus became a kind of product. While their intentions were pure, they nevertheless allowed a form of idealism to flood evangelical churches, which would have the impact of flattening divine action and turning the personhood of the living Christ into an idea that would allow you as an individual to reach your authentic goal... Jesus (bound as an idea), then, was not all that different in form from other ideas, like diet pills, political parties, and all sorts of other products... While these charismatic evangelicals continued talking about a personal relationship with Jesus and seeking ecstatic experiences in worship, they nevertheless made faith formation about commitment to the idea of Jesus, stripping formation, ironically, of its transcendent encounter with divine action, making conversion an epistemological shift rather than an ontological encounter.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Liesch, *New Worship*, 169.

<sup>230</sup> Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, location 1755-1757.

<sup>231</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, trans. Geoffrey B. Kelly and John D. Godsey, Dietrich Bonhoeffer 1906-1945: Works, v. 4 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001).

<sup>232</sup> Root, *Faith Formation*, 83.

The key to the church's mission lies in facilitating ontological encounter (of the person Jesus), and yet it has continued to preach epistemological shift (to the idea of what the church *says* about Jesus).

Root suggests the ecclesial movement toward epistemological shift over ontological encounter has largely to do with modernism.<sup>233</sup> Immanuel Kant posited that all rational knowledge is derived from immanence through what he called the phenomenal.<sup>234</sup> Anything beyond immanence, beyond the experiences of the senses, was considered not knowable. Kant allowed for the influence of the numinous over the phenomenal, but post-Kantian ideologies moved further into the precedence of immanence. Kant's philosophy has had a huge influence over the way the numinous can be logically discussed. In the Western world, transcendence has been viewed with a healthy dose of scepticism, with precedence given to the immanent and the measurable. Kant's ideas have been critiqued and expanded upon *ad nauseam*, but of particular interest here is nineteenth-century philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer saw music as a perfect example of something which went beyond Kant's neat categories, something that operated both in the phenomenal and the numinous. Schopenhauer said that music was a sense-based experience which unlocked mysteries that were real and yet beyond our knowing.<sup>235</sup> Perhaps this is why music remains such an effective path for facilitating ontological encounter; we accept music's power to transcend the neat

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>234</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J. M. D. Micklejohn (London, UK: Bell and Daldy, 1871), <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.hn1tu1&view=1up&seq=1>

<sup>235</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969) 1:530-531.

categories upon which the rest of our lives seem built. Music exposes where we have built on sand rather than solid rock.<sup>236</sup>

As Jesus is being transfigured, a father asks the nine disciples waiting at the foot of the mountain to heal his son, and yet they cannot until Jesus is back with them.<sup>237</sup>

While Jesus is absent, they have no ability to do the ministry set out for them. The church without Jesus is powerless. Chrysostom said that Jesus' bemoaning of the "unbelieving and perverse generation"<sup>238</sup> is directed at the crowd, but Davies and Allison suggest that Jesus is disappointed in the disciples and accuses them of spiritual regression.<sup>239</sup> The word ὀλιγοπιστίαν (little faith) is similarly used to describe Peter's doubt (ὀλιγόπιστος) and the disciples' worries (ὀλιγόπιστος), cowardice (ὀλιγόπιστοι), and distraction (ὀλιγόπιστοι).<sup>240</sup> The word ὀλιγοπιστίαν is linked to the perverse and unbelieving, and although this includes the disciples as a part of their cultural reality, there is a difference. The point here is that in order for the disciples to be effective within their context, their small faith must be rooted in Jesus.

This brings us back to Paul's formation in the singing of Philippians 2:6-11. This hymn offers a paradox that is both phenomenal and numinous; Jesus, who is the transcendent God, did not use being God to get out of the immanence of death, but instead opens the door to the possibility of eternally redemptive ontological encounter.

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<sup>236</sup> Mt 7:24-27.

<sup>237</sup> Mt 17:1-20.

<sup>238</sup> Mt 17:17.

<sup>239</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, eds. J. A. Emerton, C. E. B. Cranfield, and G. N. Stanton (Edinburgh, UK: T & T Clark, 1991), 2:724.

<sup>240</sup> Mt 14:31, 6:30, 8:26, 16:8; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 715-716.

This is the structure of our faith and the chord chart for the church. Root writes that “while the structure of music is forming, it is not reductive of reality but opens us up to the depth of reality.”<sup>241</sup> This hymn in Philippians is the music which breaks open Paul’s ontological encounter. Without Jesus, the church is left as powerless as the unbelieving and perverse generation with their worry, cowardice, and distraction. Using this hymn as a chord chart to sing a new song, the true freedom for which the age of authenticity longs becomes possible. This is a ‘little faith’ which cares less about the substance of the miracle than the outcome of the encounter. As one Wesleyan eighteenth-century miner said: “I don’t know if Jesus changed water into wine, but I do know that in my house he changed beer into furniture.”<sup>242</sup> This is ontological encounter which casts out demons, changes lives, and sings transformation.

The mission of the church to evangelize the unchurched relies upon the whole variety of gifts to witness to and embody this kind of ontological encounter.<sup>243</sup> Many only know a Christianity clouded by media misrepresentations. The church has grown moldy behind closed doors. Without the Spirit, all ecclesial forms, including liturgical music, becomes awkward, inauthentic, and ineffective.<sup>244</sup> Tillich’s cultural conversion framework indicts ecclesial forms which perpetuate estrangement between religion and the majority of people formed by contemporary culture. Adherence to a distinct ecclesial culture that is unintelligible to those whose primary language is the common vernacular

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<sup>241</sup> Root, *Faith Formation*, 166.

<sup>242</sup> Davies and Allison, *International Critical Commentary*, 32. This miner’s faith was the pivotal factor in his victory in a battle with alcoholism which took all his money. In this case, and many like it, the suffering of the man’s family was not enough to cause him to change. Instead, his encounter with Christ lived out in a caring and grace-filled community was able to change his and his family’s life in a very practical way.

<sup>243</sup> 1 Cor 12.

<sup>244</sup> Harding, “To Sing or Not,” 194.



compromises the mission of the church, making effective evangelism extraordinarily difficult. If it considers itself beyond its own pronouncements, the church can artificially create a religious culture which obfuscates the divine. As Tillich writes, when religion becomes an ultimate unto itself; “it makes its myths and doctrines, its rights and laws into ultimates and persecutes those who do not subject themselves to it.”<sup>245</sup> The cultural isolation that religion once used to wield authority has abetted its own increasing cultural irrelevance. Evidence of ontological encounter is in Christian discipleship rather than protecting and cloning forms.<sup>246</sup> Bonhoeffer stresses that discipleship cannot be simulated, and even blind adherence to doctrinal norms in and of itself will fall short; discipleship requires transformation.<sup>247</sup> Music remains one of the most effective ways to inspire ontological encounter with those formed by a dominant culture who have become conditioned to be suspicious of the church’s claims.

The success of ecclesial forms is not measured in attendance, but rather in Christological transformation. How worship shapes and forms worshippers into followers and disciples of Jesus is the measurement of missiological success. Very much like encounters with art and music, the church requires worship that inspires a longing and seeking beyond the self. Tillich's existential theology of culture helps articulate this and can help the church be open to the reality that it is not the art or music or worship itself which does the expanding. If the measurement of discipleship is in the actions and lives of the followers, we are left with the bleak reality that the ecclesial forms in the mainline

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<sup>245</sup> Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 8.

<sup>246</sup> Hart, *Faith Thinking*, 187.

<sup>247</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship*, 281-287.

church are failing many people formed by contemporary culture. According to Tanner, theological efficacy can be measured by how well it helps people cope with life's questions, and engage in and make meaning of their cultural reality.<sup>248</sup> Tillich challenges that the root of the church's current failure is its estrangement from the ultimate concern expressed by contemporary culture. If interactions with church music and other liturgical forms do not inspire action or shape disciples and followers of Jesus, they are no longer tenable. Jesus continues to be found and brought to life in those places where God is needed most; the challenge is finding artistic forms which inspire the unchurched to discover and embody that which is the ultimate concern at the core of existence.

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<sup>248</sup> Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, location 943-944.

### Chapter 3: Wish You Were Here

Speak to me in a language I can hear

Steeple guide me to my heart and home

Smashing Pumpkins, "Thirty-Three," from *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*, 1995

*Liturgical Efficacy: Venerating the Vernacular, Flaunting the Functional, and  
Contemplating the Communal*

In order to understand how liturgical rock music could work, it makes sense to start with a basic understanding of the intended liturgical role of hymnody in general. For this, John Witvliet's model of what congregational music should accomplish liturgically will be followed:

- the music should be **vernacular**: its message should be accessible and intelligible to a wide variety of people;
- the music should be **functional**: it should accomplish the purpose for which it is intended, including enabling worship, giving thanks and praise, confessing, inspiring ontological encounter with the divine, or any other liturgical need; and,
- the music should be **communal**: it should express the voice of the whole community rather than one or a select few.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, 258-260.

Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, working from polymath Michael Polanyi's theory of personal knowledge, suggests that every rational thing we do as an adult is hopelessly dependent upon our culture, social context, and previous experience.<sup>250</sup> If this is the case, then assuring the use of vernacular music in our liturgies is key to inviting people into the experience and participation of worship. UCC theologian Ron Atkinson writes that “worship must become a creative act taking into consideration the context and the nature of the persons involved.”<sup>251</sup> If those whom we wish to involve have an experience where the music in worship is not in the vernacular, it potentially compromises the efficacy of the liturgy.

In order to determine the current Canadian musical vernacular, the radio or a list of the top selling albums can be consulted. The popularity of an individual work is an imperfect indicator of vernacularity, but general consistencies in styles and genres among popular works signal correlation. People understand music via their previous experience with music. If we want to know what kind of music is ‘good’ to most people, musicologists agree that the only reliable gauge is popularity, in particular paying attention to what musical trends persist over a period of time.<sup>252</sup>

Over the past half century, rock songs have populated the top 100 more often than any other genre, including pop music.<sup>253</sup> Coldplay was the most streamed band on Spotify in 2017.<sup>254</sup> However, the trend over the past three years has made rap the fastest

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<sup>250</sup> Alasdair C. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1988), 4.

<sup>251</sup> As cited in Bagnall, “Celebration,” 230.

<sup>252</sup> Jansen, “When the Music Fades,” “Background,” Paragraph 9.

<sup>253</sup> Beckwith, “Music Genre Popularity.”

<sup>254</sup> Spotify, “Top Songs.”

growing genre, and in 2018 Jewish-Canadian rapper Drake's song "God's Plan" became the most streamed song ever with over one billion listens.<sup>255</sup> Spirituality is increasingly a part of the modern rap scene, considering the popularity of artists such as Drake and Kanye West. A huge part of accepting the new song that God is inspiring in many unchurched hearts is to use the musical language they understand. When it is implemented authentically, people report that worshipping using music they enjoy feels more genuine.<sup>256</sup> This is in part because modern psychology finds that we respond positively to music that we recognize.<sup>257</sup> The use of vernacular music styles is shown to increase the likelihood of participation of those who are uncomfortable with, or threatened by, the traditional church stereotype.<sup>258</sup>

Determining the spiritual functionality of any piece of music is as subjective as any other aspect of music. It depends a great deal on the context, time, place, and a host of other sometimes immeasurable factors. Functionality in the liturgical sense certainly goes far beyond sheer entertainment value; it is determined by people's emotional movement and challenge as they experience the music. Scharen suggests that the traces of old gospel music found throughout rock creates a dynamic that makes rock a surprisingly functional choice for use in worship.<sup>259</sup> Also, popular rock music is often better at dealing with 'real life' issues than either traditional hymnody or CCM.

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<sup>255</sup> Beckwith, "Music Genre Popularity;" Spotify, "Top Songs."

<sup>256</sup> Wuthnow, *All in Sync*, 165.

<sup>257</sup> Witvliet, "Discipleship and the Future," "The Theological Significance of Musical Form," Paragraph 2.

<sup>258</sup> Malefyt and Vanderwell, *Designing Worship Together*, 135-136.

<sup>259</sup> Scharen, *Broken Hallelujahs*, 15-18, 54-59.

One of the most powerful ways that rock music could function in the liturgy is by evoking emotions leading to a transcendent ontological encounter with the divine. Worship which calls on a strong emotional response has a long history. It was shown that in Scripture, ancient Hebrew worship was profoundly emotional and physical, with people's posture and demeanour often radically changing in the worship of God. The faithful in the Hebrew Scriptures worshipped God with every aspect of themselves, including their mind, will, emotions, body, and senses.<sup>260</sup> One of the things that rock music does well is convey and elicit emotion. Repetitive choruses, sweeping crescendos, anticipatory quiet sections, deep vibrating bass, and steady rhythm all draw the listener into the music. Many musicians and music lovers can attest to rock music's powerful capacity to help transcend the solely cerebral existence in which we operate and temporarily allow the emotive to transcendently envelop the whole.

In most UCC congregations, raising one's hands to the shoulders is unusual. Our music contributes to our frozen nature. If you watch the crowd at any popular rock concert, you will see physical manifestations of spiritual behaviour. Raising hands, singing, praising – but to the false idol of a popular band, as Pope Benedict XVI pointed out.<sup>261</sup> These behaviours come from a spiritual place and functional liturgies can help people at least acknowledge this holy place within them. All congregants do not need to raise their hands or act like they are at a rock concert for worship to be genuine, but the total lack of this behaviour might be a sign of dysfunction in our traditional liturgies. The functionality of liturgical music can be determined by how it helps worshippers encounter

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<sup>260</sup> Liesch, *New Worship*, 151.

<sup>261</sup> Ratzinger, *Spirit of the Liturgy*, 148.

the spiritual and opens them up to seek and connect with ultimate concern.<sup>262</sup> Reports of powerful connections to God through rock music is an indication of its spiritual functionality, and using it also shows that the church cares about the people for whom this music is so functional.<sup>263</sup>

Of the three liturgical duties posited by Witvliet, building community is the one where rock music possibly falls short, at least in mainline denominations. Although people seem fully engaged to sing their favourite rock songs at a concert, it is rare that a UCC congregation will sing a praise chorus as lustily as old favourites like “Amazing Grace” or “How Great Thou Art.” This in part has to do with the genre's composition style. Contemporary composition is solo-oriented and designed for listening, not singing.<sup>264</sup> The amplified nature of contemporary music is known to make participation more difficult and separates music leadership from the congregation due to the performance-based, culturally-formed expectations of the genre.<sup>265</sup> Rock is not generally predisposed for congregational singing; it sounds unnatural and contrived without its signature idiosyncrasies and irregular vocal rhythms.<sup>266</sup> This is partly why CCM ends up feeling different than popular secular rock music; it is written with participatory singing in mind. The value of communality may be a large part of the resistance to liturgical rock music. If the congregation cannot sing the songs, then part of what brings the community closer together is lost. Modern scholars agree with those from a century ago – liturgies

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<sup>262</sup> Harmon, *Ministry of Music*, 21; Manning, “Tillich’s Theology of Art,” 156; Evans, *Open Up the Doors*, 10-11.

<sup>263</sup> Wuthnow, *All in Sync*, 165.

<sup>264</sup> Notebaart, “Introduction,” 5.

<sup>265</sup> Harding, “To Sing or Not,” 193; Mark Mummert, “Techniques for Leading,” in *Leading the Church's Song*, ed. Robert Buckley Farlee (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 15.

<sup>266</sup> Polman, “Praise the Name,” “Background,” Paragraph 5.

which remain participatory are those which evolve to reflect the local collective experience.<sup>267</sup>

Even if traditional hymnody has been better at creating communal liturgies for those who grew up in the church, it is becoming less and less effective. The current cultural paradigm means that congregational singing has become difficult, since people are not singing communally the way they once did.<sup>268</sup> Music's power is in its ability to focus people in worship; an awareness of the cultural forms of the people the church hopes will come sit in the pews is equally necessary to making congregational singing natural, inviting, and functional.<sup>269</sup> The place where functionality and communality meet is in the tactus of the music – Mark Mummert defines this as “the pulse that propels melody and harmony in time.”<sup>270</sup> The tactus of congregational participatory song must be predictable and natural. For example, placing breaks at the ends of phrases was once used to emphasize textual meaning, but it has become awkward because of the predictability of modern recorded music.<sup>271</sup> Where this kind of practice is continued, it can compromise not only the music’s functionality but the ability for contemporary people to participate. The old hymns and forms were learned by rote and frequent repetition, quite similarly to how the crowd at a rock concert learned to sing along. New music needs time for the congregation to become comfortable and competent. Although rock music does not seem communal in a traditional church service, the genre is one of the most powerful tools for

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<sup>267</sup> Thomas Harding and Bruce Harding, “Ritualism and Anti-Ritualism,” in *Ordered Liberty: Readings in the History of United Church Worship*, ed. William S. Kervin (Toronto, ON: United Church, 2011), 191.

<sup>268</sup> Notebaart, “Introduction,” 6-8.

<sup>269</sup> Harding, “To Sing or Not,” 191.

<sup>270</sup> Mummert, “Techniques for Leading,” 11.

<sup>271</sup> Harding, “To Sing or Not,” 196.



creating unity in megachurches.<sup>272</sup> There is now more than one generation who are simply unfamiliar with the melody of traditional hymnody because of changes in the vernacular style.

Congregations may feel contemporary music is not a valid option because the musicians are not available or there are few in the congregation who would prefer it. Both these presumptions should not be made too hastily. One excellent strategy is to ask for youth leadership in presenting the songs. The prevalence of prerecorded music and tutorials on YouTube make learning complex pieces a lot easier than it was for the previous generation of musicians.<sup>273</sup> In nine months, a rural Prince Edward Island church was able to grow a repertoire of 44 songs using many musicians who had no previous musical experience.<sup>274</sup> Encouraging music programs which will deepen spiritual commitment and help shape new worship leaders is possibly the best way that rock can invite a new generation into fuller participation in the faith community. Learning to play an instrument is a spiritual act in itself; research supports that there is a positive correlation between arts involvement and spiritual commitment.<sup>275</sup> Although learning an instrument requires private practice, playing live rock music is a communal event which requires being in relationship with, and in the same physical space as, other musicians.<sup>276</sup>

There is a perception that active communal participation in the liturgy is the driving force behind spiritual growth. The opposite is more often the case – active interest

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<sup>272</sup> McDowell, “Christian But Not Religious,” “Music as Church,” Paragraph 1.

<sup>273</sup> Polman, “Praise the Name,” “Discussion,” Paragraph 4. As someone who learned to play guitar from magazines, I am envious of the plethora of educational tools available to the current generation.

<sup>274</sup> Gale, “OMG Rock!”

<sup>275</sup> Wuthnow, *All in Sync*, 76.

<sup>276</sup> This is changing as technology in 2020 now allows people to play communal music from separate physical locations.

in spiritual growth is a strong driving force behind communal participation.<sup>277</sup> Rock music excels in being functional and vernacular, but unleashing its potential communality would require an ecclesial cultural shift. If radical welcome is lived out, the Spirit will blow into our sanctuaries and refresh our dry bones.<sup>278</sup>

*Missiological Efficacy: The Potential Power of Power Chords*

With the lights out, it's less dangerous

Here we are now, entertain us

Nirvana, "Smells Like Teen Spirit," from *Nevermind*, 1991

The argument over the acceptability of one kind of music over another can be compared with the arguments in the early church over ritual purity and practice. Peter's vision of impure foods showed that his religious practices imposed a barrier between him and the possibility of staying with the Gentile Cornelius.<sup>279</sup> The food purity laws were inhibiting relationships and eroding the most important commandment – that we love each other as we would want others to love us.<sup>280</sup> Paul instructs that no food in and of itself is impure, even if it has been sacrificed to an idol.<sup>281</sup> However, Paul does go on to say "if anyone regards something as unclean, for that person it is unclean,"<sup>282</sup> and also,

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>278</sup> Ez 37:1-14.

<sup>279</sup> Acts 10:10-16.

<sup>280</sup> Mt 7:12; Lk 6:31.

<sup>281</sup> Rom 14:14a.

<sup>282</sup> Rom 14:14b.

accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters... the one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them.<sup>283</sup>

Paul's intent here is to be inclusive rather than exclusive. The problem with music is that it is highly personal and there is no way to turn off the congregational music we do not enjoy other than rudely plugging our ears or walking away from the worship space. Paul's exhortation regarding accepting the weak in faith must be considered with the understanding that some find the melody of traditional hymnody as offensive, garish, or distasteful as rock music is for others. It does not make sense to think of the 'weak of faith' as those who are in church every Sunday and who insist on traditional hymnody. Rather, we should consider the 'weak' to be those who have chosen to exclude themselves from worship because they cannot stomach the worship presentation, or those who have stayed away from the church because it has not used forms that they can understand. A radically welcoming church's mission is to the 'weak' for whom Paul urges us to make room, and it should aim to ensure its liturgy is not an obstacle to their participation.

The controversies over worship forms and styles have left out a large group of people for whom rock music or other genres are all they understand. The opportunity is available for worship leaders to creatively expand people's understanding and expectations of what it means to worship and also to reach out to those who feel excluded or jaded by traditional forms. No musical style is taboo; Peter was not 'invited' by God to

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<sup>283</sup> Rom 14:1, 3.

eat at Cornelius's house, he was 'commanded' to eat.<sup>284</sup> Our forms are not holy; holiness is in how our forms participate in and point toward the love and relationship that is at the heart of the Gospel. If the church is going to sing a new song to God,<sup>285</sup> then it can learn from tradition what works and what does not. Luther's vernacular approach spoke more effectively and enduringly to people's hearts and minds than Zwingli's or Calvin's. Using rock liturgies can be compared to Luther's translation of the Bible into German, a language comprehensible to the people he was trying to reach.

Christ dines and shares himself with those who need him most – the sinners and the outcasts.<sup>286</sup> A church focused on a missiology expressed through radical welcome will need to use liturgies which reflect the universality that Jesus embodies. Music has the transcendental power to unlock the ability of worshippers to “participate fully, consciously, and actively not only in the liturgy but also in the life of the world as agents of salvation.”<sup>287</sup> The music language of the unchurched is not the same as the music language used in church, and so it remains a real and present barrier to their participation.

When rock songs are properly implemented in worship, they have been noted to be “a means of intimate and enjoyable worship expression for the younger generation who values direct experience. They effectively educate children and are understood by the visiting nonbeliever... [and] help new believers become spiritually grounded and give expression to their faith.”<sup>288</sup> The church has the challenge of harmonizing what it is

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<sup>284</sup> Wuthnow, *All in Sync*, 181-182.

<sup>285</sup> Is 42:10; Ps 33:3, 96:1, 98:1, 144:9, 149:1.

<sup>286</sup> Mk 2:15-17.

<sup>287</sup> Harmon, *Ministry of Music*, 17.

<sup>288</sup> Woods and Walrath, *Message in the Music*, “The Good, Bad, and Ugly of CWM,” Paragraph 3.

singing with *why it is singing it*. The church sings so that it may more fully embody the Christ whom it calls people to ontologically encounter. It is a ritual invitation which inspires and unlocks self-understanding and self-reflection in the context of the cultural framework.<sup>289</sup> What the church sings, then, needs to effectively point people toward entering into the paschal mystery and encountering the divine. Hymn writer C. H. Steggall in 1848 mourned: “How different... are things today from the soul-stirring meetings of the early Christians at which, St Jerome tells us, the sound of their oft-repeated ‘Amen’ was like a peal of thunder.”<sup>290</sup> In the age of authenticity, music which does not break open the heart will be insufficient as a liturgical tool.

People who are distrustful of organized religion still seek transcendence and find it outside the institutional structures.<sup>291</sup> Rock-based liturgies could appeal to their sense of curiosity and help break down their inherent distrust of the church and liturgies of their parents’ generation. Gilmour writes that “as this is a generation increasingly removed from organized religion... the arts provide a surrogate spirituality and a venue to explore, express, and experience transcendent possibilities.”<sup>292</sup> Those who believe in the efficacy of good theology know well that without liturgies that speak to this generation, the outcome will be a movement onto the fast lane of the highway to hell. It is the church’s responsibility to take its mission seriously so as to show people the better, narrow stairway that leads to salvation.

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<sup>289</sup> Harmon, *Ministry of Music*, 10.

<sup>290</sup> Gant, *Sing unto the Lord*, 288.

<sup>291</sup> McDowell, “Christian But Not Religious,” “Conclusion,” Paragraph 1.

<sup>292</sup> Gilmour, *Gods and Guitars*, 157.

Like other artists, musicians live in a world of spiritual expression. There are some interesting examples of how the curiosity of this exploration has led unlikely people to Christ. Swedish black metal band Reverorum ib Malacht started as a professed Luciferian band, but in order to perfect their blasphemies they studied Roman Catholicism; they converted and have continued in their genre as a professed Roman Catholic black metal band.<sup>293</sup> There are more prominent examples of bands who started as explicitly anti-religious and whose use of Christian and religious themes have moved from the negative to the positive. Trent Reznor, frontperson and lyricist of Nine Inch Nails,<sup>294</sup> released the single “Heresy” from the album *The Downward Spiral* in 1994. The lyrics are unambiguous about Reznor’s religious position:

He sewed his eyes shut because he is afraid to see  
 He tries to tell me what I put inside of me  
 He got the answers to ease my curiosity  
 He dreamed up a god and called it Christianity  
 God is dead and no one cares  
 If there is a hell, I'll see you there

Compare this to lyrics from Reznor decades later in “Find My Way” from the 2013 album *Hesitation Marks*:

Lord my path has gone astray, I'm just trying to find my way  
 Wandered here from far away, I'm just trying to find my way  
 You were never meant to see all those things inside of me  
 I have been to every place, I have been to everywhere  
 I'm just trying to find my way

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<sup>293</sup> Joe Rosenthal, “Gloria in Excelsis: A Conversation with Reverorum ib Malacht,” *Invisible Oranges*, August 15, 2017, accessed April 9, 2019, <http://www.invisibleoranges.com/reverorum-ib-malacht-interview/>

<sup>294</sup> Possibly the most famous industrial band of all time.

Oh, dear Lord, hear my prayer

Similarly, The Smashing Pumpkins frontperson and lyricist William (Billy) Corgan's early music was infused with religiously-critical language and imagery. In the Grammy-winning "Bullet with Butterfly Wings" from their 1995 double album *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*, the ending of the song is screamed:

Tell me I'm the only one, tell me there's no other one  
 Jesus was an only son  
 And I still believe that I cannot be saved  
 And I still believe that I cannot be saved  
 And I still believe that I cannot be saved  
 And I still believe that I cannot be saved

However, years of singing Jesus' name must have had an impact on Corgan; he released an album with the band Zwan in 2003 called *Mary Star of the Sea*, which included the song "Declarations of Faith" which features the chorus:

I declare myself, declare myself of faith  
 I declare myself, declare myself of faith

If there was any doubt of what the source of that faith was, consider the lyrics to the track entitled "Jesus, I / Mary Star of the Sea"

Jesus, I've taken my cross, all to leave and follow thee  
 Jesus, I've taken my cross, all to leave and follow thee  
 I'm destitute, despised, forsaken, all to leave and follow thee, and follow thee  
 Man may trouble to distress me to drive my heart to the cross  
 Yeah, man may trouble to distress me to drive this heart to the cross  
 I'm resolute, reviled, forsaken, all to leave and follow thee, and follow thee  
 Jesus, Jesus, Jesus  
 Reborn, reborn, reborn, reborn

Of course, the fact that there are angry twenty-somethings who reject religion and then find it again later in life may not exactly be a mind-blowing revelation. However, if this is something that happens regularly, the church of radical welcome needs to ensure its liturgies can speak to these people in vulnerable and searching times or it will fail its mission to these seeking souls. If musical superstars Reznor and Corgan have gone through this kind of transformation, the church has a mission to those who have followed a similar religious journey. There are a growing number of Christians who say that contemporary music, particularly heavy and hardcore rock, has been indisputably imperative to their Christian faith journey.<sup>295</sup>

The suggestion to use secular music is a compromise in a musical landscape lacking good alternatives. Rather than investing in property, the church could move toward commissioning more inviting liturgical music. Witvliet declares that the “megachurch challenges us to redouble our efforts to compose and publish music that not only meets poetic, theological, and musical criteria but also respects attempts to embrace vernacular and populist forms of expression.”<sup>296</sup> There are good examples of favorite hymns along the way that seem to have struck this balance. Gant waxes poetic about “Lord of the Dance” by Sydney Carter, saying it “is a real modern [original] folk-song. It uses the structure of burden and refrain. Its imagery has all the vivid immediacy of folk art... the language is simple and unadorned... as the same time, there is meaning and an element of mystery. What is this dance?”<sup>297</sup> Evans writes that “there are few things more

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<sup>295</sup> McDowell, “Christian But Not Religious,” “Conclusion,” Paragraph 3.

<sup>296</sup> Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, 264.

<sup>297</sup> Gant, *Sing unto the Lord*, 349.



powerful than songs written out of the teaching *of* a local church, *for* that local church.”<sup>298</sup> In order for this to happen, the support for these potential songwriters needs to be felt and funded.<sup>299</sup> The church has stalled so long on musical reform that it is not only the young who are unsatisfied with the music; in one substantial study considering only people under 50, the support for experimentation with progressive music styles jumps above 50 percent across all denominational groups.<sup>300</sup> By introducing rock liturgies, people who write in popular genres may feel more compelled to apply their talents to write music for the church.

Another available option is to follow the long history of Christian lyricists who relied on parody like Luther, Wesley, Booth, and Williams. Linda Hutcheon offers this take on parody, saying it can be found “operating as a method of inscribing continuity while permitting critical distance. It can, indeed, function as a conservative force in both retaining and mocking other aesthetic forms; but it is also capable of transformative power in creating new syntheses.”<sup>301</sup> Like Booth suggested, parody can undermine secular culture to subversively share the Gospel.<sup>302</sup> This subversion is not about hiding the light in a clay jar,<sup>303</sup> but sensitively introducing the light to people who have come to fear and distrust it. It is a way of getting people to lower their defenses and open themselves up to the possibility of worship.

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<sup>298</sup> Evans, *Open Up the Doors*, 162, emphasis original.

<sup>299</sup> “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Mt 6:21.

<sup>300</sup> Wuthnow, *All in Sync*, 150-151.

<sup>301</sup> As cited in Gilmour, *Gods and Guitars*, 58.

<sup>302</sup> I once played a parody of Sweet Caroline, which along with other generous edits replaced the titular lyrics with “Jesus Christ;” one congregant said about a month later that every time Sweet Caroline came on the radio, all he could think about was Jesus.

<sup>303</sup> Lk 8:16-18.

Perhaps the most challenging pastoral issue is the comfort those who have grown up in the church continue to find in the old hymns. These people have been inextricably indoctrinated by the church music genre. For them, this music is much more likely to be associated, even conflated, with worship. The golden oldies are understandably beloved by the church, but they are at best a mysterious curiosity to the unchurched, and at worst hokey and off-putting. The problem with exclusive self-replicating forms is the intense devotion to them by their promulgators. The adoption of new liturgical forms needs to consider the education of the faithful on why it is being done. This requires a pastoral focus on missiology, something which traditional protestant Canadian churches like the UCC publicly express but do not always practice well.<sup>304</sup> If a church claims a missiology of radical welcome and there have been no new worshippers in the past month, it might be time to review the mission strategy. Worship can be an act of ecclesial palliative care, but if this is a church's lived mission it should be made clear to visitors. Otherwise, it would be like inviting someone to a celebratory party and having them unwittingly walk into the intensive care unit. This is the kind of dissonance which makes people understandably unlikely to accept future invitations.

Regardless of the music used in the liturgy, how people are being moved<sup>305</sup> is a measurement of its efficacy. Assessing the cultural reality of the unchurched shows that authentic expressions of vernacular styles are important, but no matter how good the music is, if it cannot be understood, it cannot inspire "ritual surrender to the paschal

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<sup>304</sup> Although UCC frequently does missiology quite well by raising awareness of social issues, it has run into continuing issues with evangelizing its vision.

<sup>305</sup> In any dimension, including but not limited to: spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, relationally, or physically.

mystery.”<sup>306</sup> Accessibility and intelligibility on its own is also insufficient; the focus must also be on how the liturgy moves people. Robert Laird offers that

guitars provide a point of access into liturgy for people who don't connect with more traditional hymnody and accompaniment in the church... the guitar can be the ideal instrument for accompanying singing in worship. Its use in popular music makes it especially well suited for pop song forms in the church.<sup>307</sup>

Religious art should not rely only on mimicry of contemporary styles, but rather use them to liberate worshippers in an expressiveness that makes sense given their cultural formation.<sup>308</sup>

If the mission is to the unchurched, the adoption of new liturgical forms must be done with radical welcome as its authentic driving force, or people will see through the sham. Gant warns:

The ‘touching-the-hearts’ style, often imitated, misfires when it sounds as if it is lazily reaching for a borrowed gesture of words or music, Pavlov-style. Borrow the gesture, and you can end up borrowing the thought: touching the heart without going through the brain. But at the same time, nothing sounds as tired as music which is trying to be ‘modern’. ‘Integrity’ is an old-fashioned word, but it still means something.<sup>309</sup>

The great theologian Hauerwas said in a 1987 seminary presentation: “The church has missionary power in direct proportion to its liturgical integrity.”<sup>310</sup> Contemporary or traditional forms are not inherently bad, it is how we use these forms that threatens unity

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<sup>306</sup> Harmon, *Ministry of Music*, 19.

<sup>307</sup> Robert C. Laird, “What About Guitars?,” in *What Would Jesus Sing?: Experimentation and Tradition in Church Music*, ed. John Bell (New York, NY: Church, 2007), 97.

<sup>308</sup> Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 48.

<sup>309</sup> Gant, *Sing unto the Lord*, 372.

<sup>310</sup> As cited by Walter R. Bouman, “Identity and Witness: Liturgy and the Mission of the Church,” *Institute of Liturgical Studies Occasional Papers* 43 (1989), accessed April 13, 2019, [https://scholar.valpo.edu/ils\\_papers/43/](https://scholar.valpo.edu/ils_papers/43/), 115.

and communal values.<sup>311</sup> A church service conducted in Greek may be more biblically traditional, and some may indeed prefer it, but most Canadians would not be able to understand it. Clive Marsh urges that “if Christian theology is going to say something meaningful to the modern world, it must meet people where they are... in a meaningful way.”<sup>312</sup> Modern theomusicologists are picking up on the same things that Tillich noted decades prior; it is theology's ability to be in conversation with culture which makes it effective for a culturally-formed populace.

Liturgical music is not entertainment. There is a movement, a spirituality, which is inherent in its production and consumption. It expresses the ontological encounter for which humanity was made. In God’s image, we were created seeking relationship. The church, as Christ’s body, needs to engage with popular music in order to fulfill its mission to evangelize the unchurched.

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<sup>311</sup> Harding, “To Sing or Not,” 194.

<sup>312</sup> As cited in Nantais, *Rock-a My Soul*, 43-44.

## Conclusion

You realize the sun don't go down

It's just an illusion caused by the world spinning round

The Flaming Lips, “Do You Realize??,” from *Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots*, 2002

Win Butler, the lead singer of Grammy-winning and eleven-time Juno-winning alternative rock band Arcade Fire, was raised Mormon and studied theology at McGill University. The band’s 2013 release *Reflektor*, which won a Juno for album of the year, was heavily influenced by Kierkegaard’s essay “The Present Age” which Butler said accurately describes the kind of alienation and hesitation that seems to define the current culture.<sup>313</sup> In their stage show for the tour of the album, a caricature of Pope Francis<sup>314</sup> danced on a riser in the midst of the crowd alongside a person dressed entirely in mirrors. Although Butler distances himself from organized religion, religious language and themes are prevalent throughout the all of the band’s albums. For example, their 2007 album *Neon Bible*, which was recorded in an old church in Montreal and features pipe organ, has songs like “The Well and the Lighthouse” with its closing lyrics:

Resurrected, living in a lighthouse  
the lions and the lambs ain't sleeping yet

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<sup>313</sup> Patrick Doyle, “Win Butler Reveals Secret Influences Behind Arcade Fire’s ‘Reflektor’,” *Rolling Stone*, October 22, 2013, accessed April 12, 2019, <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/win-butler-reveals-secret-influences-behind-arcade-fires-reflektor-83028/>

<sup>314</sup> In the case of the concert I attended in Montreal, it was person dressed in a white robe and wearing a giant paper mâché Pope Francis head.

Having a theological formation increases the listener's enjoyment of Arcade Fire's albums, but it also increases the intensity of the implied criticisms of the institutional church contained within. Butler is suspicious of commercialized churches, saying that "religion betrays the influence of contemporary society, presumably its uglier qualities."<sup>315</sup> In his estrangement from organized religion, Butler is critical of a church which reflects the worst of culture rather than embodying unconditionally loving relationship.

The name *Reflektor* comes from Kierkegaard's suggestion that, in his time, humanity had moved from an age of passion to an age of reflection where people were paralyzed in thought.<sup>316</sup> Kierkegaard marks the difference in between the two eras by saying the conditions for heroics are gone in the reflective age.<sup>317</sup> He writes that in the passionate age, heroes would venture out on fatally thin ice in pursuit of a prize and society would celebrate their bravery. In the reflective age, those who resist the urge to pursue the prize are celebrated and those who would risk harm are derided as fools.<sup>318</sup> In the reflective age, evil is resisted but so is the inclination for good. Kierkegaard does not question that people are well-intentioned, but rather is bothered by the reality that people are not willing to act upon impulses at all. This is a world where logic rules and where transcendence is sought solely in rationality rather than in ontological encounter. The restraint of passion in the reflective sounds like the church at Laodicea:

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<sup>315</sup> Gilmour, *Gods and Guitars*, 60.

<sup>316</sup> Søren A. Kierkegaard, *The Present Age*, trans. Alexander Dru (New York, NY: Harper, 1962 [1846]), accessed April 8, 2019, <https://www.scribd.com/document/296853866/Kierkegaard-The-Present-Age-Full-Text-Trans-Alexander-Dru-A>.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. For you say, “I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.” You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked... Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.<sup>319</sup>

The UCC had its golden age; it was rich and prospered. Even though that age has passed, the promise remains – Jesus stands at the door knocking.

When confronted with a differing view, Michael Schwartzentruber urges the church to speak its truth while being open to honouring the validity of the truth of the other.<sup>320</sup> This is a way of loving others as we ourselves would want to be loved.<sup>321</sup> Demands for a cultural circumcision, as Liesch put it so well, is the demand for people to find their justification in the law rather than in an encounter with Christ. The current implicit expectation is that the unchurched must reject their cultural musical preferences in order to participate in worship. Evidence of this musical rigidity can be found in any church which restricts musical selections to a few hymnals. This limitation is the musical equivalent of the narrow view of biblical literalism. Those that demand people succumb to biblical literalism are asking for a substitution of one rationality for another, a cutting off a part of one’s self, a surrendering to an epistemological shift. With music, we can signal the transcendence of this with the anticipation the singing of a new song. This is where a progressive Christ-centred faith shines; it allows Jesus to be the centre through the primacy of relationships with others. The church is the place where there is no longer

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<sup>319</sup> Rev 3:16-17, 20.

<sup>320</sup> Michael Schwartzentruber, “Inclusion in the Midst of Evolution,” in *The Emerging Christian Way: Thoughts, Stories, & Wisdom for a Faith of Transformation*, ed. Michael Schwartzentruber (Kelowna, BC: CopperHouse, 2006), 246.

<sup>321</sup> Mt 7:12, Lk 6:31.

classification,<sup>322</sup> only encounter with the same ultimate concern at the root of all Creation, phenomenological and numinous. Harmon writes that “in God’s design, we are the object of song rather than its subject. We become its subject only when we use song to sing back our love to the God who first loves us and sings within us.”<sup>323</sup> Believers are the song’s subject when they sing God’s praise. The curiosity of others is a function of reflection; the church can fulfil its mission by urging the movement from curiosity to being the object of God’s love song by embodying, witnessing, and ontologically encountering the transcendent.

The power of music to transcend boundaries has been well known throughout history. Some have sought to harness it, where others feared it. Under King Edward VI, Elizabeth I’s younger brother and predecessor, a movement toward vernacular liturgies was sought while attempting to eliminate music from the church entirely, “partly because it got in the way of understanding, and partly because of its well-known tendency to lead directly to moral decay and loose living.”<sup>324</sup> The thing the church has often missed is that the place of moral decay and loose living was the place where Jesus’ ministry flourished. Church should be a place where drug addicts feels welcomed, where prostitutes can expect to be valued for their humanity, where the deplorable can find acceptance and grace in God’s love. It is in places rife with pain and longing that people are most open to and ready for the kind of life-altering message that the Gospel brings.

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<sup>322</sup> Gal 3:28.

<sup>323</sup> Harmon, *Ministry of Music*, 12.

<sup>324</sup> Gant, *Sing unto the Lord*, 78.



In order for the church to fulfill its mission to share the Gospel to those who are living estranged from the source of ultimate concern, it must be able to speak in a language they can understand and in which they can participate. The prophetic function of the church witnesses to the divine against the forces of estrangement. Tillich says we overcome the demon of estrangement by meeting people in their own concern, rather than by condescension or indoctrination.<sup>325</sup> The deification of our forms makes welcoming the estranged difficult, especially in an age where people are innately suspicious of inauthenticity and institutions. Ultimate concern in our culture is currently being best expressed by contemporary artists, in particular through music.<sup>326</sup> In this way, religion and much of contemporary rock seek the same ends.

Music is polarizing. A fully realized Christian culture and theomusicology does not need reorganization, instead it needs transformation by the realization that the author of all that already exists is the Word made flesh. The church needs to affirm the transcendence that people are encountering in popular music and be very careful about denying the meaning they are finding there. Jeremy Begbie writes that “fights over music can tear a church apart quicker than almost anything else.”<sup>327</sup> It is not surprising that the first nationwide controversy that threatened the stability of the new union in the UCC was over music.<sup>328</sup> Of course, this thesis only feeds this kind of controversy and division. At

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<sup>325</sup> Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 50, 207.

<sup>326</sup> Wren, *Praying Twice*, 65; Manning, “Tillich’s Theology of Art,” 158. In the same vein, Tillich was adamant that Van Gogh’s *Starry Night* is a much more religious work of art than many of the Realist works of the same era that are explicitly religious.

<sup>327</sup> Jeremy S. Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (Grand Rapids, IL: Baker, 2007), 23.

<sup>328</sup> William S. Kervin, “Conclusion: The Dialectic of United Church Worship,” in *Ordered Liberty: Readings in the History of United Church Worship*, ed. William S. Kervin (Toronto, ON: United Church, 2011), 322.

times of arguing over form, it is easy to see why Tolstoy would say that “the church is an invention of the devil; no honest man believing the gospel can remain a priest or preacher.”<sup>329</sup> The negativity expressed toward church music here is coincidental to its contribution to missiological dissonance, and it is intended to draw attention to the way the institutionally-defined genre has dominated what is considered liturgically acceptable. When a church publishes a hymn book, it is a statement about the kind of music it is expecting its congregations to sing. Using Tillich's conversionist argument, the rejection of contemporary forms in the church is evidence of institutional Christianity's estrangement from the divine as expressed through contemporary culture's expression of ultimate concern. Including rock liturgies can help the church become more aware of its culpability in this estrangement. Tanner offers that

when theological claims are hardened in a way that obstructs obedience to the Word, they too need to be broken and their provisionality revealed. Borrowed materials should not, then, always be subordinated to Christian claims; they should be permitted, instead, to shake them up where necessary... Christian culture would just not be the sort of culture that demands uniformity of practice.<sup>330</sup>

In the church, there cannot be a declaration of an acceptable or unacceptable genre based on musical qualities alone.

The church is filled with a lot of well-intentioned people. Congregations and leadership are generally supportive of those willing to share their talents in the sanctuary.<sup>331</sup> The problem has not been in making room for the preferences of the majority of church members and attendees, but rather in the way that our lack of

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<sup>329</sup> As cited in Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 61.

<sup>330</sup> Tanner, *Theories of Culture*, location 2267-2269, 2392.

<sup>331</sup> Wuthnow, *All in Sync*, 77-78.

evolution of forms has excluded those who have different musical preferences.<sup>332</sup> The evangelical power of music, particularly in a culture which is wary of organized religion, cannot be underestimated. Well-intentioned is not enough as

there is no doubt that the individual resting in his [*sic*] reflection can be just as well-intentioned as a passionate man [*sic*] who has made his [*sic*] decision... committee after committee is formed, so long, that is to say, as there are still people who passionately want to be what they ought to be; but in the end the whole age becomes a committee.<sup>333</sup>

To turn good intentions into actions in this age, the church will need to rely on the kind of authentic miracle of which Jesus says the church is more than capable.<sup>334</sup>

The ripest mission field is not overseas. There are a growing number of people right here in Canada who do not realize what the Bible actually says. Many only know a Word clouded by media misrepresentations. The church, much like the dominant culture around it, has loved money more than its mission, has loved its structures more than welcoming relationships, and has loved itself rather than its neighbour. For this kind of evil, Jesus is the only cure.<sup>335</sup> We have preached condemnation where God offers liberation; we have preached division where God offers unity; we have preached judgement where God offers grace. Luther knew that forcing people to learn Latin only kept the Scriptures out of reach.<sup>336</sup> Whatever style of music evangelizes the Gospel helps

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<sup>332</sup> Tillich, *Theology of Culture*, 8.

<sup>333</sup> Kierkegaard, *The Present Age*, 4, 6.

<sup>334</sup> Jn 14:12-14.

<sup>335</sup> Mt 6:24; 1 Tim 6:10.

<sup>336</sup> Arguably, the best way to study the Bible is to learn the original Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic; however, for the average person, accessibility to the Scriptures requires a translation in a language they can understand. This would imply that translations rendered in obsolete versions of English would also be inadequate.

us harmonize with Paul as he sings, “I become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.”<sup>337</sup>

Resistance to contemporary music styles hinders the efficacy of the liturgy and mission of radical welcome. Although contemporary rock can seem performance-based, it is more functional at creating openness to transcendence than traditional hymnody, especially among those for whom rock is the musical vernacular. The arguments against introducing contemporary styles in the church are often flawed, and more dangerously, exclusive to a majority of the people in Canada. The time has come to throw open the church doors and provide sanctuary to the new song that God has written on people's hearts.

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<sup>337</sup> 1 Cor 9:22, cf. Liesch, *New Worship*, 165.

## Epilogue: The Encore

I believe in the Kingdom come

Then all the colours will bleed into one, bleed into one

But yes, I'm still running

You broke the bonds and you loosened chains

Carried the cross of my shame, of my shame

You know I believe it

But I still haven't found what I'm looking for

U2, "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For," from *The Joshua Tree*, 1987

Since I became enraptured by this topic over ten years ago, the landscape of popular music has changed dramatically, not only in genre preference but also in delivery. People are consuming music in a different way which I think makes the substance of this thesis all the more critical. Music reform is necessary in order for the church to evangelize a new generation. Culture and art consumption is changing so much that this will require a lot of nimble flexibility, a trait which has largely eluded the traditional church for millennia. Liturgies should be shaped for intent. As rock music fades from popularity, it will become a less appropriate genre for the purpose of evangelism. The church missed a prime opportunity during the rock music era that followed the 1960s when we were working out who we were as Canadians. We are

diverse, and I believe that diversity is very good; the body is made up of many parts.<sup>338</sup> This, too, should be liturgically expressed. The shape of popular culture is changing faster than ever. Some are saying that we need to get back to our roots, and I actually agree. However, I do not believe our roots are well served by the form of liturgies that have existed in the church over the past century; we need to go deeper. People have moved toward something new, something that actually suits the church even better. We should give a shout of praise that in the age of authenticity, the phenomenal and the numinous are not as separate as we have been led to believe. In this landscape, good theology thrives. When I was first considering Christianity after my flirtations with Taoism and atheism, I remember the horror of the words that Jesus speaks to Saul: ἔξαιρούμενός σε ἐκ τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἐθνῶν, εἰς οὓς ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω σε.<sup>339</sup> Paul would need constant saving, as people always resist any truth that causes discomfort. Studying and playing music has been a great source of comfort for me in both the secular and church worlds. A lot of wonderful church people, many of whom are big fans of contemporary secular music, feel threatened by the idea of musical reform because it asks us to give up a source of comfort. In the biblical story, the comfort of the faithful has never been of as much interest to the divine as the comforting of those to whom the faithful are called. This is my prayer – that the church learns to speak a language that contemporary Canadians understand because the mission field is ripe. The harvest will be

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<sup>338</sup> 1 Cor 12:12-14.

<sup>339</sup> Acts 26:17, “I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles to whom I sending you.” Revised English Bible [REB].

plentiful, but the labourers are few.<sup>340</sup> Let the church get on with its mission, knowing that so long as Christ walks with us, we never sing alone. Thanks be to God!

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<sup>340</sup> Mt 9:27, Lk 10:2.

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