

Created to Worship: The Practice of Devotional Listening and Christian Contemporary Music

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Over the past fifty years, American Protestant churches have witnessed a significant shift in sacred music. Christian contemporary music (hereafter CCM), a blend of rock and pop with religious lyrics, became a familiar presence both on the radio and in the church. While many excellent studies have detailed the musical and lyrical characteristics of CCM as well as the features of its history, theology, liturgical use, and industry practices, few studies have explored the role of CCM in the daily lives of listeners.

This study begins to fill that gap, to understand how listeners are using CCM and the role they ascribe to devotional listening. To do so, I draw from focus-group interviews at four churches. In these interviews both laity and clergy were asked about their personal religious music listening habits outside of church.

The answers given reveal that music is a powerful force in listeners' religious lives. By listening in the background of daily life, they create an atmosphere that shapes their emotions and reinforces their faith. They find greater ease in their attempts to engage in other devotional practices and in their experience of God. I find that underlying this practice of devotional listening is the respondents' conception that music was uniquely created by God to be a tool for spiritual engagement. In these congregations, being created to worship means also being created to sing.

Literature Review

The role of music in worship has a long and contentious history in Protestant theology.² The views of Martin Luther and John Calvin give an excellent overview of the contours of the argument. On the surface level, they appear to take opposing viewpoints.³ Luther embraced the broad use of music in the church, and found value in hymns, choirs, and instrumentation. On the other side, Calvin restricted the use of music to psalms sung a cappella by the congregation. However, both of them operated from a similar understanding of the relationship between music and faith.

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² Theological discussions of the role of worship in music and emotion in the life of the believer go back much further in church history than the Reformation. However, as my data is drawn from Protestant churches, I am confining my discussion to Protestant thinkers.

³ Setting aside for the present argument reformers such as Ulrich Zwingli, who forbade music in the church altogether.

To Luther, music was a gift from God to humanity, be it the song of birds or the highest art music. The voice raised in song flowed from the heart as an outpouring of emotion and was then channeled through the mind and body.⁴ Inspired by Scripture, Luther claimed that music expelled the devil by fostering calmness, joy, and gratitude, and that it allowed believers to express feelings of ecstatic joy and praise beyond words. By engaging the emotions as well as the intellect, singing Scripture was more powerful than speaking it. Luther repeatedly placed singing alongside praise and thankfulness as the essence of the experience of salvation and the nature of heaven.⁵

Calvin and his followers agreed with Luther that singing was edifying for the gathered body. To Calvin, music was a gift of God, its power found in wedding emotions to intellect and its source in the human heart. It was because of music's emotional power that Calvin restricted church music to psalms sung a cappella – only the Word of God could ensure suitable worship by constraining the inherent power of music. The texts for songs could only be taken from the Bible itself without instrumentation, which might over-inflate the emotions. Hymn writing was acceptable only so long as it was contained to private devotions and excluded from congregational worship.⁶

Thus, while Luther and Calvin came to two different conclusions on the role of music in the church, they agreed that music was a gift from God with the power to shape emotions. This understanding has shaped Protestant music making to the present day, particularly in the American context. The role of emotion in sacred music and the types of music that should be cultivated in the church is pivotal to understanding the controversies over music education in the American colonies, ecstatic worship in the Great Awakenings, Victorian sentimental hymnody, and the ebullience of early twentieth-century revivalists (to name only a few).⁷ In each controversy, the opposing sides have argued for free expression or for restraint of emotions in religious music in order to shape the believer's heart.

This dynamic continued at the birth of Christian contemporary music in the 1960s. Blending various popular styles with hymns and simple expressive lyrics, early CCM artists engaged in yet another iteration of this process as they updated the music of the church.⁸

⁴ Miikka E. Anttila, *Luther's Theology of Music: Spiritual Beauty and Pleasure* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), 70, 85–95.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 96, 99–100, 104, 119–24, 132–37.

⁶ John Calvin, *Joannis Calvini Opera Selecta*, quoted in Paul Junggap Huh, "John Calvin and the Presbyterian Psalter," *Liturgy* 27, no. 3 (July 2012): 17.

⁷ To explore these controversies further, I recommend: Rebecca Bechtold, "A Revolutionary Soundscape: Musical Reform and the Science of Sound in Early America, 1760–1840," *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 3 (2015): 419–50; Philip Vilas Bohlman, Edith Waldvogel Blumhofer, and Maria M. Chow, eds., *Music in American Religious Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Glenda Goodman, "'The Tears I Shed at the Songs of Thy Church': Seventeenth-Century Musical Piety in the English Atlantic World," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 65, no. 3 (December 2012): 691–725; Stephen A. Marini, *Sacred Song in America: Religion, Music, and Public Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); David W. Music and Paul Akers Richardson, *'I Will Sing the Wondrous Story': A History of Baptist Hymnody in North America* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2011); Richard J. Mouw and Mark A. Noll, eds., *Wonderful Words of Life: Hymns in American Protestant History and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Pub, 2004); Sandra S. Sizer, *Gospel Hymns and Social Religion: The Rhetoric of Nineteenth-Century Revivalism, American Civilization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978); David W. Stowe, *How Sweet the Sound: Music in the Spiritual Lives of Americans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

⁸ For further reading on the development of CCM, I recommend: Mark Evans, *Open up the Doors: Music in the Modern Church* (Oakville, CT: Equinox, 2006); C. Michael Hawn and James Abington, eds., *New*

Opponents argued that the emotions generated by rock were too sensual to be appropriate for worship and that the music created trance states that opened listeners to demonic influences and led to mental instability.⁹ As the genre matured in the 1980s and gained a presence in secular media, opponents argued that CCM artists were promoting a sentimentalized, watered-down Gospel that was more sensual than sacred.¹⁰ Despite these objections to the emotional valences of the music, the genre thrived. It is now one of the top radio genres in the United States and is used as liturgical music in many Protestant churches.¹¹

In the 1990s, confronted with complaints about the inauthenticity of big-budget pop CCM stars, industry executives began promoting music by British and Australian church bands and worship leaders. As the praise and worship subgenre of CCM had formerly only been advertised to church leaders as liturgical music, a series of advertising campaigns re-branded the subgenre as part of the “worship lifestyle.” Ads for worship music promised the transformation of everyday life into an overwhelming experience of worshipful feeling that spiritualized even the most mundane activity. Worship lifestyle marketing was so effective that in 2003 almost half of the top twenty albums on the Billboard CCM chart were worship

Songs of Celebration Render: Congregational Song in the Twenty-First Century (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2013); Jay R. Howard and John M. Streck, *Apostles of Rock: The Splintered World of Contemporary Christian Music* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999); Monique Marie Ingalls, Carolyn Landau, and Thomas Wagner, eds., *Christian Congregational Music: Performance, Identity, and Experience* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013); Monique Marie Ingalls and Amos Yong, eds., *The Spirit of Praise: Music and Worship in Global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015); Anna E. Nekola and Thomas Wagner, eds., *Congregational Music-Making and Community in a Mediated Age* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2015); David W. Stowe, *No Sympathy for the Devil: Christian Pop Music and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

⁹ Anna Nekola, “More than Just a Music’: Conservative Christian Anti-Rock Discourse and the U.S. Culture Wars,” *Popular Music* 32, no. 3 (October 2013): 407–26; Terry W. York, *America’s Worship Wars* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003).

¹⁰ W. D. Romanowski, “Where’s the Gospel? Amy Grant’s Latest Album Has Thrown the Contemporary Christian Music Industry into a First-Rate Identity Crisis,” *Christianity Today*, December 8, 1997.

¹¹ Robert Abelman, “Without Divine Intervention: Contemporary Christian Music Radio and Audience Transference,” *Journal of Media and Religion* 5, no. 4 (November 22, 2006): 209–31; Joshua M. Bentley, “A Uses and Gratifications Study of Contemporary Christian Radio Web Sites,” *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 19, no. 1 (April 30, 2012): 2–16; K. P. Donovan, “Christian Contemporary Radio Stations Continue Steady Growth,” *The Christian Post*, January 2, 2009, accessed May 19, 2016; Deborah Justice, “Mainline Protestantism and Contemporary versus Traditional Worship Music,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and World Christianities*, ed. Jonathan Dueck and Suzel Ana Reily (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 487–512; Bob Lochte, “Christian Radio in a New Millennium,” *Journal of Radio & Audio Media* 15, no. 1 (May 14, 2008): 59–75; Deborah Evans Price, “Praised Be!: Worship Music Jumps from the Church to the Charts,” *Billboard*, October 11, 2008.

albums.¹² While scholars such as Monique Ingalls and Anna Nekola have explored the industry's contribution to the worship lifestyle, no study yet has looked at the impact of the worship lifestyle on the grassroots level.¹³

Research Questions

The trajectory of CCM and the longstanding questions of the role of emotion in sacred music raises two questions that this study attempts to answer. 1) On the ground level of individual Christians, how do believers and local church leaders use CCM outside the church? 2) What lay theologies drive these practices of listening?

Methodology

To answer these questions, I conducted focus-group interviews at four churches in the Charleston, SC, metropolitan area. The four churches chosen all use praise and worship music as their primary liturgical music. The four selected churches included a Southern Baptist church, a charismatic Anglican church, a United Methodist church, and a non-denominational church.¹⁴

Each of these churches provided me with a minimum of three separate groups to interview, including at least one group of church leaders and at least one group of laity. This resulted in sixty-four total respondents, of which twenty-seven were pastors or paid church staff.

The following questions were asked about the use of religious music outside the church:

1. Outside of church, in what places or activities do you listen to religious music such as worship music or Christian contemporary music?
2. What proportion of the music you listen to outside church is religious, and what influences your choice between religious and non-religious music on any given day?¹⁵

¹² Anna Nekola, "I'll Take You There': The Promise of Transformation in the Marketing of Worship Media in US Christian Music Magazines," in *Christian Congregational Music: Performance, Identity, and Experience*, ed. Monique Marie Ingalls, Carolyn Landau, and Thomas Wagner (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), 117–36; Anna Nekola, "Negotiating the Tensions of U.S. Worship Music in the Marketplace," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and World Christianities*, ed. Jonathan Dueck and Suzel Ana Reily (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 513–32.

¹³ For example, see: Monique Marie Ingalls, Carolyn Landau, and Thomas Wagner, eds., *Christian Congregational Music: Performance, Identity, and Experience* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013); Nekola and Wagner, *Congregational Music-Making and Community in a Mediated Age*.

¹⁴ The congregation of the respondents will be designated as SBC, AC, UM, and ND, respectively.

¹⁵ The identification of music as "religious" or "non-religious" was left to the interviewees to avoid imposing assumptions. The interviewees were asked to give a rough proportion, which they usually did in percentages. The percentages they reported fell clearly into three categories—above 90%, 50–60%, or below 25%. I will refer to those groupings as "mostly or all religious music," "half religious music," and "little to no religious music," respectively. Due to time constraints I was not able to ask this question in the non-denominational church leader's interview.

3. How important is religious music to your religious life outside church? What role does it play in your spiritual life?

Respondents discussed the questions together in each group. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The results were then analyzed inductively. The interviews were read once, and a list of preliminary themes gathered. The interviews were re-read and the preliminary themes were coded while additional themes were noted. Finally, the interviews were read through a third time for a final coding. This process is ideal for such data as it allows themes to arise naturally from the data and has been used elsewhere to analyze reactions to religious media.¹⁶

Results

The questions in the focus group interviews addressed the respondents' individual use of religious music, apart from their church activities. They were asked about the other places and activities in which they listen to religious music, why they choose to listen to religious music outside of church, and what role it plays in their spiritual lives. The answers to those questions paint a picture of the perceived power of music in evangelical life. The respondents allow the music to permeate their daily lives, creating access to God that eases their religious practices, regulates emotions, and provides access to powerful spiritual memories. Woven throughout this practice of listening are a set of assertions about the power of music to shape children and to ward off evil, and God's ability to speak through music that overpowers the quotidian. These assertions are inextricably tied to the notion that music is unique in the created order.

Places and Spaces

The respondents reported listening to religious music in a wide variety of venues, but the primary use was as background music to other tasks. Respondents spoke of listening to the music in almost every venue of daily life: while driving, working, and at home. Far and away the most common use of CCM was to occupy the mind while driving. As one leader reported:

It's on when I'm in the car. Something formative that happened to me in high school was that I switched from secular music to listening to only Christian music . . . I had a 35 minute commute to high school . . . on the way home I would listen to Christian music and it transformed me.¹⁷

The choice to listen to CCM while driving was spoken of as a simple way to introduce religious music into their lives while also fighting the monotony of the commute.

¹⁶ Ahmed Al-Rawi, "Online Reactions to the Muhammad Cartoons: YouTube and the Virtual Ummah," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 54, no. 2 (May 2015): 261-76.

¹⁷ Interview Feb. 18, 2016, 2:00 PM, SBC1.

Next to the car, the most popular venue to listen to CCM was at work, but this split the clergy and laity. For laity, listening to CCM at work was a way of focusing their minds and energies. In the words of one Anglican congregant: "I think listening to worship music in the background while I'm working actually really helps me focus and be productive."¹⁸ However, for most clergy listening to CCM at work was simply work. "I listen to it at work, but I work at a church, so . . . when is it personal? That's a different balance to figure out in life if you work at a church full time."¹⁹ The leaders who confined their listening to work were far more likely to be critical of CCM as containing inferior music or poor theology. Worship leaders in particular reported listening to religious music only to prepare for the Sunday services.

Respondents also reported using the music in the daily routines of life, in bedtime or morning habits, while exercising, or as part of household chores. A leader made worship music the alarm on his phone, "so when I wake up in the morning it's to the atmosphere of worship. It just changes the approach you have on the whole day."²⁰ A layperson echoed: "I just leave it on in my bedroom, so there's always music playing, Christian music . . . whenever I'm home alone, just to have that echo."²¹

The practice of listening to music while distracted by other activities is so commonplace as to be taken for granted, yet is spiritually significant. One expects to have a religious experience while giving one's full and undivided attention to religious media, as in a worship service. This can make background religious music seem to be an attenuated form of religiosity. However, this is not the case. Background music alleviates anxiety and boredom by allowing the mind to escape into the musical world when concentration on the task at hand fails. When it is not being attended to, the rhythms and tones of the music continue to act physiologically, increasing or decreasing heartbeat, for instance. The biological effect alters one's mood, and thus one's stance towards the world.²² Understood this way, background music is a tool we use to manipulate ourselves, altering our emotional state and so changing our perception of the world around us.

Further, the occasional glancing attention we give the music is an invitation to enter the music more fully. The respondents' stories of listening to religious music in daily life exemplify this dynamic. Several respondents narrated tales of encountering God when they heeded the invitation to enter the spiritual world of sacred background music, as in this account given by two leaders at the United Methodist church:

UM1 - I feel like anytime that I'm willing to invite God, he's willing to say something. I was in the laundry room one time and listening to the music and had a moment in the laundry room. So I think it's everywhere and anywhere that I'm willing to ask and listen.

¹⁸ Interview June 28, 2016, 7:00 PM, AC2.

¹⁹ Interview July 21, 2016, 4:00 PM, ND1.

²⁰ Interview May 26, 2016, 9:30 AM, ND4.

²¹ Interview Feb. 24, 2016, 2:00 PM, SBC14.

²² Randall Pabich, "Indra's Note: An Investigation into Musical Awareness" (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 2007), 123-49.

UM3 – It's true. There have been times that I've been loading the dishwasher and I'm in tears.²³

A leader at the Southern Baptist church described a similar moment while listening to worship music in the background of housework:

I have literally dropped to my knees, just being around the house cooking or cleaning and listening to a song and then I'm overtaken with worship. Sometimes we may be playing a podcast from a teacher or something and I don't know that I've ever gotten to my knees with that. I may stand and listen to something, but there's something about music that does that to me.²⁴

This idea, that music is as or more powerful than sermons and Bible reading, was repeated in the interviews at every level of involvement and across denominations. While music playing in the background of people's lives may be a distracted mode of engagement, part of the value of this mode of listening for the respondents is that it creates an environment in which God can break into the everyday. The respondents overwhelmingly affirmed the effectiveness of listening to background music as a spiritual practice. Both the subtle emotional shifts and the invitation offered to more deeply engage with the music are important to this practice.

Secular and Sacred

Church leaders were less likely than their congregants to report listening to religious music outside the church. The leaders were evenly split among "mostly or all religious music," "half religious music," and "little to no religious music." In contrast, the responses of the congregants was heavily skewed towards listening to religious music, with over half of their congregants reported listening to "mostly or all religious music" while only a third reported "half religious music" and only one in ten reported "little to no religious music." For those who listen to religious music regularly, emotional maintenance and spiritual growth were the most commonly cited motivations.

Clergy have a variety of reasons for not listening to religious music. As described above, some want to listen to something different when not working. The use of non-religious music creates a distinct mental space when they are off-duty. However, a few of the respondents who did not listen to religious music regularly criticized CCM as bad music. It is important to note that these respondents expressed a great deal of enjoyment for their church's music, and that the music commonly played at all the churches surveyed was largely the same praise and worship or CCM hits that are popular on Christian radio. Despite this, these respondents felt there was a difference between their church's music and other Christian music, particularly in the areas of creative authenticity and theological depth.

Congregants and their leaders otherwise agreed on the reasons they choose to listen to religious or non-religious music on any given day. There were two categories of motiva-

²³ Interview June 28, 2016, 2:00 PM.

²⁴ Interview Feb. 24, 2016, 10:00 AM, SBC6.

tions: emotional maintenance and spiritual growth. For this purpose, emotional maintenance refers to both cultivating desired emotions and controlling negative emotions. Spiritual growth includes both teaching and reaffirming faith. Each of these categories points to the importance of devotional listening as a tool for shaping the self.

The most prevalent reason for listening to religious music was emotional maintenance. Respondents lauded the calming quality of religious music. One respondent said,

If I listen to worship music it's because I'm needing the Lord with me at the moment . . . Emotionally speaking, worship music has done a lot for me . . . I needed the Lord and his healing and I would listen to a lot of worship music then because he would speak directly to me through that and I could just feel his spirit in it and I knew he was with me while I was listening to it and worshipping with it.²⁵

Religious music was termed "soothing"²⁶ and "peaceful."²⁷ Respondents found the practice of listening to sacred music was "helpful for me to process particularly hard times,"²⁸ that "it'll help calm me down,"²⁹ and that they "sleep better listening to it before bed."³⁰ This quality of CCM was particularly useful to congregants who reported listening to the music in the car with their children because it will "quiet them down"³¹ as well as frustrated parents "like when I'm trying not to murder my children in the car . . . we need to turn on Christian radio so I remember to be nice."³²

The connection between calmness and religious music was confirmed by the fact that the respondents almost unilaterally preferred secular music for exercise. Running, walking, and working out were all mentioned by respondents as high energy activities best accompanied with secular music, as in this conversation:

SBC3 – [I listen to secular music] probably about 50% for me, which is a little weird. But I work out and that's the primary time that I listen to music, when I work out.

SBC1 – Yeah, I can't listen to Christian music when I work out.

SBC2 – You don't? Oh, I've got a whole track of running music that's bpm's [beats per minute].

SBC1 – I need something a little angrier.

²⁵ Interview July 6, 2016, 7:00 PM, UM1.

²⁶ Interview Feb. 18, 2016, 2:00 PM, SBC3; Feb. 24, 2016, 2:00 PM, SBC9 & SBC13.

²⁷ Interview July 21, 2016, 4:00 PM, ND1.

²⁸ Interview June 29, 2016, 1:00 PM, AC3.

²⁹ Interview July 21, 2016, 4:00 PM, ND3.

³⁰ Interview July 21, 2016, 4:00 PM, ND1.

³¹ Interview Feb. 25, 2016, 10:00 AM, SBC3.

³² Interview Feb. 25, 2016, 2:00 PM, SBC4.

SBC3 – It’s interesting what [SBC1] was saying about background music. I don’t listen intently to the words, it’s really more the beat of the songs. Because sometimes I’m like “oh, that’s not a good message.” . . . I use it just for the beat, not the words.³³

Even though much of CCM is fast-paced, upbeat pop-rock rhythmically appropriate for exercise as SBC2 points out, and even though the respondents claim not to be listening to the lyrics, the non-religious music is still deemed “angrier” and that anger is associated with productive physical energy. The listener’s perception of the religiosity of the music is what constitutes its lack of energy. Religious music is perceived as calming, while secular music is perceived as energizing.

This association is supported by other respondents’ uses of non-religious music. While some listeners use religious music to sacralize housework, others preferred non-religious music for the same reasons as the exercisers. One said, “If I need to get some energy going, to clean the house, then it’s going to have to be beach music.”³⁴ Others reported listening to non-religious music to set the tone “on a ladies night out. I bust out the country and I crank it up and it’s just fun,”³⁵ or “sometimes I just feel rowdy, so I put the sunroof back and put the windows down and I crank it up.”³⁶

According to these narratives, the respondents are connecting calmness with spirituality and excitation with physicality. This duality of spirituality and physicality parallels the mind/body dualism commonly found in Western society and Protestant churches, in which the self is divided into mind/spirit and flesh. “Traditionally, [the body] has been viewed as something to be overcome in order to receive the joys of heaven.”³⁷ Religious music thus acts on the emotions to order and control them so that the listener can engage in calm rational thought and good behavior. Non-religious music is perceived to act on the emotions through the beat, pushing the body into a state of excitement conducive to physical activity. This paradigm of musical energy thus reflects and reinforces the dualities of soul and body, rationality and physicality, sacred and secular.

The relationship between music and emotional energy was most palpable in the responses connecting the practice of listening to the music to spiritual warfare. Interestingly, all the respondents who made this connection were congregants at the Southern Baptist church, rather than the charismatic or non-denominational congregations.³⁸ Two respondents in one group said, “it plays a role in spiritual warfare” and “it does help me recall scripture and know exactly, for spiritual warfare.”³⁹ Another respondent in a different group gave more detail: “Part of me believes there’s a spirit world out there, and that [religious music listening]’s one way we can fight evil.”⁴⁰ A leader echoed a similar sentiment. Speaking of the

³³ Interview Feb. 18, 2016, 2:00 PM.

³⁴ Interview Feb. 24, 2016, 2:00 PM, SBC6.

³⁵ Interview Feb. 25, 2016, 2:00 PM, SBC7.

³⁶ Interview Feb. 18, 2016, 2:00 PM, SBC3.

³⁷ Jessica Harren, “Bones and Bread: Knowing God in Our Bodies through the Communion Table,” *Journal of Religion, Disability & Health* 13, no. 3–4 (August 18, 2009): 276–77.

³⁸ While this may seem to be an odd doctrine to occur in a Baptist church, it is an excellent example of the manner in which the music creates a shared spiritual language among the listeners, as Pentecostal distinctives like spiritual warfare trickle into otherwise non-charismatic congregations through the medium of the music.

³⁹ Interview Feb. 25, 2016, 2:00 PM SBC1 & SBC7.

⁴⁰ Interview Feb 24, 2016, 2:00 PM, SBC6.

power of listening to religious music to quell anxiety, he said: “Saul was going through tormented spirits and David played. When I’m hurting or I’m struggling, I will listen because it has a soothing effect.” The passage he cites is 1 Samuel chapter 16:14–16:

Now the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. And Saul’s servants said to him, “See now, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord now command the servants who attend you to look for someone who is skillful in playing the lyre; and when the evil spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will feel better.”⁴¹

David plays and the evil spirit ceases tormenting the king. While the pastor elides the existence of evil spirits, saying Saul was “going through tormented spirits” in the context of his own anxiety, the connection between faith and music is clear. Religious music is a weapon against evil, whether that evil is within oneself or without, and the power of the weapon lies in its ability to soothe emotions.

Besides emotional maintenance, the other major motivation for listening to religious music reported by the respondents was spiritual growth. This took two major forms: reaffirmation of faith and teaching, particularly the religious instruction of children. In the case of the former, CCM acts as “a reminder, you know, of the Lord”⁴² and a reminder to praise God for one respondent who believes that “God deserves to be praised all the time.”⁴³ Another respondent felt reconnected to his faith through conviction brought on by listening: “a lot of times I find it a reconnection for me, a reaffirming of my faith . . . it can be a conviction thing. And not in a condemnation, but a conviction. ‘Here’s a promise I have for you, realize it’s there.’”⁴⁴ The reminder of personal connection is a powerful reaffirmation of faith for these respondents. That personal connection can be quite intimate:

And I think for me, music when I’m listening to it just makes me feel God’s presence and the Holy Spirit just kind of fills me and I’m just, we’re having a thing together.⁴⁵

The presence and speech of God fill these narratives of musical encounters with the divine. For these respondents, the practice of listening to religious music is something they choose because in it they find a direct connection to God that reinforces their beliefs about who they are and who God is. The nature of this connection will be explored further in the next section.

The final factor that respondents cited in their decision to listen to religious music was the presence of children and the desire to teach them to be faithful. As with the respondent who used music to avoid “murdering” her children in the car, listeners use the music to inculcate religious teachings in their children. This is not surprising – as children are the focus around which hopes and fears for the future converge, any important spiritual practice will be encouraged for children, which is the case here.⁴⁶

⁴¹ 1 Sam. 16:14–16 (NRSV).

⁴² Interview Feb. 24, 2016, 2:00 PM, SBC1.

⁴³ Interview Feb. 25, 2016, 2:00 PM, SBC4.

⁴⁴ Interview July 21, 2016, 4:00 PM, ND4.

⁴⁵ Interview Feb. 25, 2016, 2:00 PM, SBC2.

⁴⁶ Ann Burlein, *Lift High the Cross: Where White Supremacy and the Christian Right Converge* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 3–21.

Fears and hopes surround the respondents' views of their children. Some listened to religious music from fear of the content of secular music and commercials – “you don't have to worry about what's coming on,”⁴⁷ and “you just can't trust a radio station anymore.”⁴⁸ For others, listening to religious music was about their hopes for their children – “in the mornings when I get up the first thing I do is go down and put worship music on, so when the kids are coming down to get breakfast we just want to set an environment that connects them with God and prepares them for their day.”⁴⁹ Another respondent combined both fear and hope in her response: “I'm trying to impress upon them [children] that we're here to glorify God . . . a lot of the music out there, the words do not glorify God and it's not appropriate for little ears to hear.”⁵⁰

The leaders and laity at the Southern Baptist church were the most vocal about children listening to music, with at least one respondent bringing it up in each group. One leader began only listening to religious music after the birth of her first child because “garbage in, garbage out.”⁵¹ In another group, several respondents engaged in a lively discussion of training children in devotional listening. The conversation began with assertions that secular music contains too much material that is “inappropriate” and unedifying for children. Adults could indulge in listening to secular music, but only because they can distinguish between what is “trashy” and what is not. Eventually, the conversation turned to specifics of teaching children to practice listening:

SBC3 - We were riding in the car and my grandsons were in the back. We were both in the car and John said, “we can't play that with Grandma in the car.” So they know what Grandma likes! (laughter) It's funny!

SBC7 - To the point that when we walk into a store, my girls will go, “is this a Christian store? I hear Christian music” (murmured agreement).

SBC2 - We have conversations with our girls. So Taylor Swift is really big in our house right now, and . . . there's stuff she says that she shouldn't be singing to little girls. But we've had those conversations and so it's so funny because Claire, she's our 10 year old, she will self-edit. When she says “Oh my God” she will say something else, or some of the other language that's in there, she puts in her own little descriptives and it's really funny. She just belts it out. But we have those conversations, because they're going to experience language and things and whatever else at school, on the playground, here (laughs) . . . we talk and we equip them to make right decisions.⁵²

The final respondent in this discussion draws together the threads of why children are such a concern and why music is important: the world is out there. These parents understand that the larger culture that their children will be interacting with is not one that shares their religious worldview. Fear and hope intertwine in the sheltering of children from

⁴⁷ Interview Feb. 25, 2016, 10:00 AM, SBC8.

⁴⁸ Interview June 28, 2016, 2:00 PM, UM3.

⁴⁹ Interview May 26, 2016, 9:30 AM, ND4.

⁵⁰ Interview Feb. 25, 2016, 10:00 AM, SBC1.

⁵¹ Interview Feb. 18, 2016, 2:00 PM, SBC2.

⁵² Interview Feb. 25, 2016, 10:00 AM.

worldly influences by restricting them to religious music. As they do so, the parents instruct the children in how to discern the approved from the unapproved, to recognize approved music and by extension approved stores and people. By learning this musical practice of “self-editing,” parents expect this editing to extend to the rest of life and so secure their children’s religious selves. In this practice of listening, the background music is expected to shape the listener’s emotions and faith, be they child or adult. The music reaffirms the faith commitments made by the adults and trains the children to listen appropriately. As the next section will demonstrate, the goal of this shaping is to break through the distractions of everyday life to create ease in one’s relationship with God.

Devotional Importance

The importance of these listening practices for these respondents was that they created a connection to God that facilitated other religious practices, particularly prayer, Bible reading, and remembering spiritual events. When asked about the role of religious music in their spiritual lives outside church, the respondents overwhelmingly stated that religious music creates a connection to God or a space conducive to finding God. Spatial terms for access to God were very common in the responses given by the non-denominational and Southern Baptist groups. One respondent said “that song [David Crowder Band’s “How He Loves”] . . . puts me into a totally different headspace, in a spiritual space.”⁵³ Another used language of background music “filling my space” while a third spoke of listening to music and being “transcended to the heavens . . . like a gateway to the spiritual realm.”⁵⁴ The importance of spatial language is for the boundaries that are created and crossed. Religious music creates gateways to heaven as listeners “realize that there is a connection there and that it opens up a door for me, breaks down a wall for me personally to connect me to God.”⁵⁵ As the music removes boundaries between the listener and God, it also creates boundaries that protect that interaction. As one leader said, “it helps people, prepares people, to hear from God . . . It seems to create space that is otherwise harder to create, because it eliminates a certain amount of distraction for me.”⁵⁶ Sacred space both creates and safeguards the religious experience.

Other respondents described musical access to God in terms of finding a connection. One respondent said, “for me it’s communication. I can communicate with God better through worship music,”⁵⁷ while another said the music “helps me start a conversation with the Lord.”⁵⁸ Listening to religious music “automatically connects me to Holy Spirit”⁵⁹ and is “a multisensory experience that can really plug you in.”⁶⁰ In this “total connection”⁶¹ “the

⁵³ Interview Feb. 25, 2016, 10:00 AM, SBC2.

⁵⁴ Interview Feb. 24, 2016, 2:00 PM, SBC5 & SBC6.

⁵⁵ Interview July 21, 2016, 4:00 PM, ND4.

⁵⁶ Interview May 26, 2016, 9:30 AM, ND1.

⁵⁷ Interview Feb. 25, 2016, 10:00 AM, SBC8.

⁵⁸ Interview June 28, 2016, 7:00 PM, AC10.

⁵⁹ Interview June 28, 2016, 7:00 PM, AC6. “Holy Spirit” used as a name without the article “the” preceding it was common in this congregation.

⁶⁰ Interview June 28, 2016, 7:00 PM, AC3.

⁶¹ Interview Aug. 10, 2016, 7:00 AM, UM1.

lyrics connect you and then it just feeds you”⁶² as “you can feel the spirit of the Lord through it as you’re seeking the Lord and tapping into that.”⁶³ The access to God provided by the music is like a conduit that allows for the exchange of power and information. When the connection is established there is a flow that “[is] going both ways. Your heart reaching out to the Lord through music but also connecting, him connecting with you also.”⁶⁴

The access to God created by the practice of listening brings with it a felt ease in other aspects of religious life and practice. Prayer is one practice that respondents claimed was easier with the aid of religious music. Respondents reported music providing words to pray, “particularly when I’m anxious or if I don’t know what words to use in prayer.”⁶⁵ The feeling of not knowing what words to say in prayer and finding language in worship music was mentioned by two other leaders:

SBC6 - I tend to go to music when . . . I’m struggling and I sometimes don’t know what to pray or sad or frustrated . . . I go to music and I’ll just kind of go in my room and shut the door and just sit before worship music and say nothing.

SBC7 - That’s what my piano playing does for me . . . if I’m in that feeling of not knowing what to say I can go sit at my piano and pick a praise song and start playing that and it takes that angst away.⁶⁶

A Methodist leader said: “There’s the classic Augustine quote ‘he who sings prays twice’ . . . There’s only so much that I can write in my prayer journal whereas my ability to just sing my heart out.”⁶⁷ At this point, the respondent let the sentence trail off and shrugged, as though overcome with emotion. Religious music eases prayer not just because it provides a sense of connection to God, but also because it provides a shared language that addresses common emotional needs, connecting the heart and the voice when words fail.

As the language in the music is often drawn from the Bible, listeners also find themselves reinforcing their interaction with Scripture as they engage with the music, as is the case with this respondent: “I can focus on the words in music better than I can focus and take in the written word sometimes.”⁶⁸ Just as music facilitates learning Scripture, it also facilitates meditation:

I’ll get a song stuck in my head, whether it’s from Sunday or somewhere, and it might just be a fragment of it . . . It helps a lot when you sing Scripture, which almost all of

⁶² Interview Feb. 25, 2016, 2:00 PM, SBC5.

⁶³ Interview July 6, 2016, 7:00 PM, UM1.

⁶⁴ Interview June 28, 2016, 7:00 PM, AC6.

⁶⁵ Interview June 29, 2016, 1:00 PM, AC3.

⁶⁶ Interview Feb. 24, 2016, 10:00 AM.

⁶⁷ Interview June 28, 2016, 2:00 PM, UM3. It is worth noting that the Augustine quotation here is unsubstantiated, though the phrase is widely attributed to him. It is attributed to Augustine in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 1156, but the footnote given in the catechism refers to St. Augustine, En. in Ps. 72,1:PL 36,914, which does not contain that exact phrase but instead has a longer rumination on the joyous singing of praise and prayers.

⁶⁸ Interview Feb. 24, 2016, 2:00 PM, SBC2.

our lyrics if they're not literal Scripture they're describing the truths of Scripture. And that can really stick.⁶⁹

This pattern is reinforced by the respondents who reported listening to religious music in their devotional times. One leader said he listens “daily! There’s never a time when I’m not reading the Word with headphones in.”⁷⁰ A layperson echoed this connection between music and Bible study:

I think it draws me a little bit closer to God’s word sometimes . . . I think it encourages me to get back into God’s word because maybe there’s an event that’s associated with that and I want to remember exactly what God’s word told me at that time and how that applies to my life now. Also just like we said about memory verses it might not be straight on but it does help me recall Scripture.⁷¹

For these listeners, the combination of Bible reading and music listening is potent, rendering the Bible more accessible in their spiritual lives. The access to God provided by religious music lubricates the interaction with God’s word, rendering it easier to focus on and remember as it is encapsulated in song.

Ease of memory is also part of a larger ease in recalling spiritual events in which God was present in a palpable way in the listener’s life. For this respondent, the memory of a spiritual experience connected to a particular song is recalled by listening to the song: “[Music is] an icebreaker between me and the Lord. Being like ‘I remember feeling this way, and I remember this truth’ because of the song and I’m able to be more introspective about what’s going on in my life rather than just staying overwhelmed and frustrated.”⁷² Another respondent reported a similar connection between music and specific spiritual events: “I can remember events that I’ve walked through in my life by certain songs. You know? Because 5 years ago [my husband] and I went through something and the first thing I did was pull up this song and turn it on as loud as I could, and I listened to it non-stop. So songs and moments correlate.”⁷³ As Monique Ingalls noted in her study of evangelical conference worship music, the combination of meaningful lyrics, memorable tunes, and emotional events renders spiritual moments more clearly in the memory, which in turn allows those events to be re-experienced in acts of devotional remembrance. The spiritual self that is remembered from that prior moment can be recalled with the simple playing of a song, reinscribing it onto the current self.⁷⁴ This data reveals that conference-going college students are not the only ones who engage in this practice. For adult evangelicals in established congregations, listening to religious music makes it easier to engage in prayer, to access Scripture, and to recall spiritual events—thus making it easier to facilitate a deeper connection to God.

⁶⁹ Interview June 28, 2016, 7:30 PM, SFA3.

⁷⁰ Interview May 26, 2016, 9:30 AM, ND1.

⁷¹ Interview Feb. 25, 2016, 2:00 PM, SBC7.

⁷² Interview June 28, 2016, 7:30 PM, AC10.

⁷³ Interview Feb. 25, 2016, 10:00 AM, SBC8.

⁷⁴ Monique Ingalls, “Singing Heaven Down to Earth: Spiritual Journeys, Eschatological Sounds, and Community Formation in Evangelical Conference Worship,” *Ethnomusicology* 55, no. 2 (2011): 255.

Created to Sing

With the access to God found in the practice of listening to religious music, listeners experience greater ease in talking to God in prayer and in hearing from God in Scripture as the language of the music facilitates their practices. They also find greater ease in connecting to key moments in their spiritual pasts, even as they seek to grow by using the music to cultivate faith and proper emotions. The question remains: why do respondents attribute these powers to music? The answer found woven through the conversations surrounding the practice of listening to religious music is simple: humans were created to worship.

One Anglican layperson said “we are all worshippers by nature. It’s a natural response.”⁷⁵ Two leaders at the non-denominational church went on at greater length:

ND3 - And we are as humans, we are created for a relationship and created for worship and when you are worshipping the Lord you are basically fulfilling your highest calling of creation . . .

ND4 - The story of the Bible is the enemy trying to distract us from what we were called to do which is worship . . . there’s still a battle for our worship. It’s significant.⁷⁶

Humans, according to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, find their chief end in glorifying God.⁷⁷ Martin Luther echoes this idea when he says, “What advantage is there in knowing how beautiful a creature man is if you are unaware of his purpose, namely that he was created to worship God and live eternally with God?”⁷⁸ In these texts worship is much more than simply singing, but the majority of the respondents did not bother to distinguish between “worship” as listening to or singing music and other practices or attitudes that might be described as worship, such as prayer or taking the Eucharist. The application of the term “praise and worship” to music, often shortened to “worship music” led by “worship leaders” and found on “worship albums,” has led to a general conflation of worship with music.

This conflation was visible throughout the focus-group interviews. Church leaders occasionally delineated between worship and music in passing, in statements such as “the people of God have always expressed worship to God through music”⁷⁹ or “[music] was the first way we learned how to worship God.”⁸⁰ One leader identified the focus of worship as the sermon, which the congregation prepares for musically: “It [music] prepares our heart for worship, for the message,”⁸¹ while another identified prayer as worship: “look at Daniel and the lion’s den, Daniel being forced not to pray, not to worship.”⁸² Only one leader, at the non-

⁷⁵ Interview June 28, 2016, 7:30 PM, AC6.

⁷⁶ Interview May 26, 2016, 9:30 AM.

⁷⁷ *Humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines: Now by Authority of Parliament Sitting at Westminster, [Concerning] a Shorter Catechism: Presented by Them Lately to Both Houses of Parliament* (London: Evan Tyler, printer to the Kings most excellent Majesty, 1647), available in Early English Books II (Wing, STC II), 1641-1700.

⁷⁸ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works. 1: Lectures on Genesis, Chap. 1-5*, trans. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann (Saint Louis: Concordia Publ. House, 1958), 131.

⁷⁹ Interview June 28, 2016, 2:00 PM, UM3.

⁸⁰ Interview Feb. 18, 2016, 2:00 PM, SBC1.

⁸¹ Interview Feb. 24, 2016, 10:00 AM, SBC6.

⁸² Interview May 26, 2016, 9:30 AM.

denominational church, detailed the difference between music and worship: “If you use the base of music and then you add theology to it . . . it’s a great way for people to express worship. *Music is not worship. But. It’s a wonderful way to be able to express our worship, one little arm of what worship can be.*”⁸³ In almost every other instance of the word “worship” in the leader interviews, an average of fifty occurrences per focus group, “worship” was used as a synonym for singing or as a modifier to a person or thing associated with music – “worship leader” for music leader, “worship time” for singing time, etc.

If humans are “created to worship,” as was stated by respondent after respondent, this conflation of music with worship has theological ramifications in practice. The merger of the two by these respondents implies that, to them, God created humanity to be innately musical, or at least to innately respond to music in a special manner. It is not surprising, then, that such ideas occurred with regularity as respondents affirmed that, in their view, music was created by God with a unique ability to influence humanity:

I think it’s [music] part of how we were created. The Bible tells us if we don’t sing the rocks will cry out. I think it’s who we are and how God made us . . . music is a gift of God and the fact that it is so powerful for people . . . there’s so many things we can’t express to a God who is so much bigger than we are through even the words we’re singing, whereas music connects the whole of who we are. And so I think music is central to how we would even begin to worship or connect to God.⁸⁴

Music is described by another leader as created by God for us to worship him⁸⁵ as well as “a God-given gift to express ourselves, to connect, to build relationship, and in our spiritual world it’s a way for us to connect with God, but it’s also a way for us to build unity together.”⁸⁶

Laity also argued that music is a special part of God’s created order: “I think the Lord has made music to touch people’s souls . . . He’s made people, built people to do that, to sing his praise.”⁸⁷ “I believe that God created us to have a relationship with him and to worship him and to praise him, and that’s the time of the service to do that [the music in a church service].”⁸⁸ The concept that God created music for people and people for music goes far towards explaining the respondents’ continual assertions of the power of music woven through the interviews. If music, conflated with worship in these congregations, is understood to have been ordained at creation to be a key part of humanity’s relationship with God, then its influence on humanity is something that extends to all people and all times.⁸⁹ Music becomes part of the first things, the originating point that determines the course of history.⁹⁰ By identifying music with worship as something that God “built into” humanity, it becomes inescapable. In the lay theologies of these respondents, humanity is naturally in a state of song. The access to God that music provides is, to them, a type of communion with God that

⁸³ Interview July 21, 2016, 4:00 PM, ND2 (italics mine).

⁸⁴ Interview June 28, 2016, 2:00 PM, UM3.

⁸⁵ Interview Feb. 24, 2016, 10:00 AM, SBC6.

⁸⁶ Interview May 26, 2016, 9:30 AM, ND5.

⁸⁷ Interview July 6, 2016, 7:30 PM, UM1.

⁸⁸ Interview Feb. 24, 2016, 2:00 PM, SBC1.

⁸⁹ Several respondents made comments about music’s universal power to speak to people of different nationalities or ethnicities, which bolster this claim.

⁹⁰ Margaret Bendroth, “Time, History, and Tradition in the Fundamentalist Imagination,” *Church History* 85, no. 2 (June 2016): 337–38.

was ordained before the Fall, as well as a preview of the future. As more than one respondent expressed in wistful longing, heaven will be full of worshipful singing, the culmination of humanity's musical nature. Thus, the connection with God facilitated by music will "naturally" shape the human heart, overriding quotidian activities, the emotional state of the moment, or evil spirits. This conflation of music and worship goes far towards explaining the powers attributed to music by the respondents.

Conclusion

This study has sought to describe the practices of devotional listening performed by American Protestants who listen to Christian contemporary music and the lay theologies that drive those practices. The practice partakes equally of the worship lifestyle and of Luther and Calvin's assertions that music is a gift from God. Tapping into what they understand to be the unique status of music in the created order, the listeners make worship music the background of their lives. Intentionally imbuing their daily lives with religious music, they create an atmosphere that reinforces their Christian identities by strengthening their faith and calming their emotions. In doing so, they find a deeper connection to God that facilitates other spiritual practices.

These results are descriptive rather than prescriptive in nature and in their discussion of theologies of worship, music, and emotion. However, it is only by understanding the grassroots practices and beliefs of Christians that we can understand the role that music is playing in their lives. Further study of the role of music in the lives of ordinary Christians is necessary to determine the beliefs and practices that are intertwined with the music.

Abstracts of Recent SWBTS School of Church Music Doctoral Dissertations

A Theoretical Analysis of *Psalm 84* for Soprano and Orchestra

Desmond C. Ikegwuonu, DMA

This document presents an analysis of *Psalm 84* for Soprano and Orchestra and is divided into two chapters. This work is composed as a symphonic poem with a setting of the Psalm text compiled by the composer for soprano soloist.

In Chapter 1, emphasis is laid on connections between the foundational thematic unit, achieving melodic continuity by displaced repetition and minimalist technique. Three sections are devoted to establishing methods of melodic extension through varied thematic repetition, the use of nonpulsed thematic unit, harmonic cadence cycle, and the exploration of "new simplicity" via diatonic pitch relationships.

Chapter 2 provides a thorough analysis of the Psalm setting for soprano including key and interval relationships, word painting, the transformation of the main thematic unit, and the choice of sonorities.

Psalm 84 reflects techniques such as melodic and harmonic inventiveness of neo-romanticism and the use of simple triadic outline and repetition in holy minimalism.

Can a Woman be a Music Minister? Bridging the Gap Between Complementarian Theology and Philosophies of Music Ministry

Jessica Jane Wan, PhD

Within complementarian circles, there are diverse understandings on the role of women in ministry. With regards to music ministry, there is no consensus among complementarians as to whether or not a woman could be a music minister in a mixed-gender corporate worship service. This dissertation addresses the issue of women in music ministry by arguing for complementarians to align their own theological stance on the role of women in ministry with their philosophy of music ministry to arrive at a coherent application for whether a woman can be a music minister in corporate worship when men are present.

Chapter 2 surveys complementarian literature on women in ministry to demonstrate a need for this study. Chapter 3 looks at the history of complementarianism and defines key terms (creation order, male headship, authority, and submission) that will be used throughout this dissertation. Chapter 4 studies New Testament passages related to women in corporate worship (1 Cor 11:2-16, 14:33b-36, and 1 Tim 2:9-15) to set the theological framework by articulating fundamental complementarian principles along with slight variances in interpretation. Chapter 5 examines roles and functions of music as well as a music minister in

corporate worship to provide philosophical considerations of music ministry. Chapter 6 answers whether or not a woman can be a music minister in a mixed-gender corporate worship by bridging complementarian theology with philosophies of music ministry. Chapter 7 concludes this dissertation by giving a summary of arguments, conclusion, applications, challenges, and areas of further research.