

# REVOLUTION

SCOTT HAWK

Published by Scott Hawk Media, Nashville, Tennessee  
All Rights Reserved

*This book, or any portion thereof, may not be reproduced in any form without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations used in articles or reviews.*

*Dedication*

For my wife Becky.

## *Acknowledgement*

Special thanks to Amy whose contributions were more than merely important.

## *Preface*

For years there has been a quiet struggle going on inside the Christian music industry. These conflicts in ideology span a diverse range of subjects. Obvious to some and not so obvious to others, the tension arises from a marriage of “entertainment” and “religion.” And just about everyone has an opinion, whether it’s Steve Camp’s letter to the industry, or Charlie Peacock’s philosophical book on the medium, the conflicts have been highlighted by some and brushed aside by others.

Yet most of those who have addressed the issues offer no substance to support why their opinions and beliefs are the correct views.

What everyone seems to forget is that the Christian community is in a constant state of flux. Comprised of a broad scope of religious beliefs, every individual holds their ideals sacred. From Catholics to Holiness Pentecostals, the community to which the Christian music industry caters is, absolutely, the hardest to appease. And while those within and outside the industry struggle with their philosophical differences, there is a revolution brewing.

## *Chapter One*

“The mind is it’s own place and in itself can make a heaven of hell or a hell of heaven.” – John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

From my perspective, today’s Christian music industry is primed for a revolution. A glimpse into my personal background should provide the insight necessary to understand my point of view. My mother and father divorced when I was very young, so I was the product of a single parent home. My mother was a wacky lady, so it’s not surprising, in hindsight, that the marriage didn’t last. To provide some perspective regarding parenting in my early years, Mom was a bit of a stoner, drinker and lesbian, and Lord knows what else. It’s almost a cliché to say that our lives were primed for a conversion experience.

At age 11, living in Culver City, California, my life changed dramatically on January 11, 1981. As usual, I was sitting on the floor in front of the television, eating cereal and watching the Crystal Cathedral because there was nothing else on. My mother walked in and found me engrossed in the program. After several moments passed she asked if I’d like to go to church. I had lived with a lesbian couple, who drank and smoked weed all the time; I had NO idea what “church” was. Fascination more than anything compelled me to say “yes.”

Several blocks from our apartment, on Venice Boulevard, was the Baptist Temple; an out-of-place southern Baptist church in a renovated supermarket. And when I say southern Baptist, I mean right down to the all white Sunday morning suit the pastor wore with his white patin leather shoes. Mom chose this particular place of worship because of her southern Louisiana upbringing. It was there, on aisle five, that I went down during the alter call to accept Christ. The associate pastor thought I was a girl, thanks to my long blonde hair that was rarely cut, so the associate pastor’s wife counseled me.

It’s just as clear today as it was 20 years ago. That night we returned to the same church for their evening service and my mother walked the aisle during the alter call. This was a radical turning point in our lives, as it is for most people who undergo a truly dynamic conversion experience. And like many families who embrace such a dramatic

turn in their spiritual life, we began a bizarre trek through the spiritual alleyways of the southern California Christian life.

How bizarre? For instance, my mother censored television by selecting the Trinity Broadcasting Network's channel; then she ripped the knob off the box. (That was back when we still had to turn a dial to change stations.) Every afternoon, after school, I had to use a pair of pliers to change the station to the "Brady Bunch."

One day Mom gave me the task of disposing of her album collection. It was quite a collection with vintage Beatles albums and more rare material. I loaded them up in my little arms and went to the dumpster behind our apartment complex. But just tossing them into the trash wasn't enough. I was instructed to break each album in half and, by doing so, prevent the spread of evil work to others who happened across them.

In a short period of time I became well versed in the Bible and spiritual theology. Television was limited to TBN. Since my mother was a single parent, I was hauled off to church every time the doors were open, and dragged along to every conference, teaching event and Bible study she attended. Usually one could find me sitting on the floor near 20 adults leafing through my Thompson Chain-Reference Bible. I would participate, highlighting passages and making notes in the margins. Youngsters are often given a musical instrument, like a guitar, on their birthdays. Then they spend every waking hour practicing, because they have nothing better to do. I was given a Bible, so my spiritual growth was rapid.

My first introduction to Christian music was through the choir director at our church. She was a homegrown southern lady who loved old-school church music. Concerts were often held at our facility featuring artists like the Blackwood Brothers and other southern Gospel quartets of the time.

Over the years I was exposed to just about everything imaginable, from the finest Biblical teachers of the time to the wackiest evangelists on the planet. My mother and I attended huge conferences as far away as Long Beach. We even spent one evening in an Inglewood all Afro-American church to witness an exorcism. I've seen it all, from the Benny Hinn's that have come and gone to the Kenneth Copeland's.

While growing up, I personally knew the family of Arthur Blessitt, the man who carried the cross around the world. His family attended our church and we visited their

home several times. I walked next to Arthur's son when he carried his half sized cross during a Jesus Fest gathering at the Rose Bowl in the early 80's.

In 1984, mother and I returned to our birthplace, Louisiana. It was there that we joined a congregation of like minds, a racially mixed church of 6,000 located near our home outside Baton Rouge.

Throughout high school, a strong conviction to my faith combined with a subtle demeanor earned the admiration of many schoolmates. By my junior year I was Chaplain in almost every club, and was known as "the quiet kid who carried a Bible in his back pocket." Each morning I led the pledge of allegiance over the school's PA system then read a passage from the Bible and led a moment of silent prayer for my schoolmates.

Throughout my teen years, I could be found sitting on a pew every time the church door was open. After graduation, I attended Bible College, having planned to work in the ministry full-time, my career of choice. Even today, few people know that I hold a degree in Theology with a Greek minor.

It was during my high school years that I was first exposed to "Contemporary Christian Music." The son of the soundman at our church copied some of his albums on tape and gave them to me.

Maturing, I began experiencing the world in new ways. Most of my life I had been alienated from the world around me because it was considered contrary to doctrine. I knew who Michael Jackson was, but couldn't name the title of a single song he had recorded. I knew who Michael Jordan was, but had never witnessed even one televised game he'd played. Separated from the world, virtually living on another planet with different customs and a language all its own, Christian-speak was my vocabulary and the church was my tribe.

After Bible College I spent a couple of years trying to find myself while working with church building programs, generally as the minister of music for the congregation. It was during that time I took a weekend job at a small Christian radio station that quickly became a full-time job.

When I finally realized my life was not at par with the rest of society, it was my radio career that saved me. It's amazing I turned out somewhat normal considering my upbringing, because nothing about it was normal. (To this day, I truly believe it was

God's saving grace that provided that career as a way out.)

Ironically, my first job in radio at WQCK-FM in Clinton, Louisiana was obtained through a contact my mother had made at a local Baptist church. The station, housed in a decrepit mobile home, was located literally in the middle of nowhere. Each evening I saddled up the Dodge Aspen and raised dust over the back roads to WQCK's 6,000-watt Christian powerhouse in the South. Station employees rarely parked next to the trailer, for fear it would finally give to its tilting weight and crush their vehicles. After making my way through the front door, and avoiding the minefield of rotted holes in the floor, I entered the control room, put on a pair of headphones, and placed myself firmly on a wooden stool. Seated behind the most archaic radio station control board known to man, I spun the latest Christian music for four hours, along with one hour of pre-recorded programming. At midnight, I gathered my belongings for the trek home, eventually hitting the sack by 1:00 am.

I wouldn't trade those two years of my life for anything. They were the most fun and exciting years I've spent in radio. That old, lopsided mobile home always brings back warm memories. I still have the station's studio on-air sign. Occasionally, I take it out of the closet and hook it up for nostalgia.

Throughout my twenties I went from job to job across the country, working at a variety of mainstream Top 40, classic rock, and active rock stations. From New Orleans to Denver to Boston, a lowly nighttime on-air personality transformed into a station program director. (I could write a book about those experiences alone.) Those years taught me that radio is a strange business, and not as "glamorous" as it seems. One program director once told me, "You're never really in radio 'til you've been fired twice." I've been fired more than a couple of times so I must be a veteran. Another told me, "You're always one paycheck away from working at a liquor store." I can attest to that as well. I met many people who think radio is a "cool" job and radio personalities are special in some way, but that's far from the truth. I found radio to consist mostly of overblown egos.

When I had my fill of mainstream radio, I returned home to Louisiana. Just as the scripture says, "Raise up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it," I returned to the radio station where my career began. As WQCK's new

program director, I got my first unsavory taste of how the Christian music industry operated.

At that time, Christian radio was far behind the mainstream in its execution and technique. From the outset, it was apparent my accumulated knowledge of Christian music, from years as an avid listener, and the skills acquired in mainstream radio outweighed the collective radio experience of the other station employees. Already a seasoned veteran, I tried to bring this little Christian station current with the times, but the task was bigger than I expected.

I programmed the station in the way I was accustomed, the way of mainstream radio. Weeding out the lackluster artists and featuring more artistic Christian bands and singers, my plans were underway to make the station sound more comparable to our mainstream counterpart, when Point Of Grace entered the picture. I don't know the girls from Point of Grace personally, but I do know what music is. And the music Point of Grace releases is more like Velveeta than real cheese. It looks like cheese, smells like cheese, tastes like cheese, but isn't cheese.

I removed all of the girls' music from the station but one song. At the time, their record label was pushing for the group's tenth number one single. There were about 30 reporting Christian stations in the nation then, which meant every single station had to keep the group's latest single in heavy rotation for it to reach number one.

Their record label repeatedly pushed us to play the single but I simply wouldn't budge. Telephone calls from a label representative attempted to pressure me, then pressure the General Manager into playing this particular song. When the station still refused, it's reporting status was promptly pulled. And Point of Grace got their number one song. One of the girls from the group even called the station to thank us for helping them hit number one. Years later I learned that the label representative had no genuine radio experience. Working at his father's station, his background was limited to Christian radio; he knew little about running a radio station, but he did know how to apply pressure to his company's advantage.

My first in depth exposure to the Christian music industry led to my resignation from that station and subsequent return to mainstream radio – where the underhanded tactics of record labels were considered business as usual.

Some years later, after programming stations in New Orleans, the Gulf Coast, in New York and working in the Boston area, my wife and I moved to Nashville. I eventually started my own company in the radio industry.

An intensive evangelical upbringing, a thorough knowledge of many denominations and doctrines, and extensive experience from a mainstream radio career has afforded me a rather unique perspective on the issues facing the Christian music industry. I never imagined that my background would eventually become the basis for involvement in an impending revolution within the Christian music community.

## *Chapter Two*

“Sing it like I told ya!” – Ike Turner, *What’s Love Got To Do With It*

Now this may be a bit hard to take, so I’ll just present it like ripping off a bandage: Christian music isn’t about ministry it’s about BUSINESS. Does it help to propagate the Gospel? Yes, in a roundabout way, but that’s not its sole purpose. Can Christian music be used to minister to someone? Yes it can, but so can all music. How something “ministers” to an individual is dependent on that person’s point of view.

For instance, I attended a concert featuring Point of Grace held at a small Baptist Church, with a full-blown light show and smoke. The girls hit the stage and sang along to choreographed steps, weaving in and out between each other with dramatic arm movements to accentuate the lyrics. It reminded me of Diana Ross & The Supremes. I expected the group to break into in their rendition of “Stop! In The Name Of Love” at any moment.

My mother had tagged along, she just loved the girls’ opening act, Aaron\*Jeffery. After the show, when the crowd began to disperse, she turned to me and said that the show ministered to her. I was a little bewildered because at no point in the show did the girls do anything more than sing songs, except for their pitch to raise funds for some project they were participating in.

In my opinion no ministry took place. There were no converts to Christianity, no tears welling up in the audiences faces, no good learnin’ from the Bible, no prophetic messages handed down by the Lord, nothing. Just a few cool dance moves and some arms waving to the music. I’m sure that there were people in attendance who felt ministered to by Point Of Grace’s music, as well as Aaron\*Jeffrey’s, but it wasn’t the point of the concert, just a bonus – like the sprinkles on a banana split.

Ministry is entirely subjective. Just think about it. One person sees “being ministered to” like dessert after a meal. Another views it as the main course. Ministry has more relevance in the second person’s view.

I tend to view the ministry as a calling. As a child I felt “called” into the ministry,

(though the feeling I had was way off base). Even so, I knew there was a difference between being “called” and feeling “led” to do something. Pastors are called into the ministry, Evangelists are called, and some Christian musicians are called to minister. But there is a vast difference between being “called” and what the Christian music “ministry” is in the mindset of the Christian church. The obvious distinction is that the cornerstone of a ministry is to either serve the body of Christ or to propagate the Gospel. Missionaries are often called to serve in some far away country to spread the message of the Gospel. They sell all of their possessions and take a life changing risk, moving thousands of miles away from family and friends, to share the message of the Gospel with people who have never heard it. Now that’s what I call “ministry.” None of the defining aspects of a cornerstone of ministry specify a record sale. Ministry is service. It’s giving up everything to serve in the manner one feels the Lord has led him. Generally, ministry isn’t profitable simply because of its nature. It’s humbling, it’s hard work, it’s being available to serve – it’s everything ministry is traditionally known to be.

Christian music is mistakenly viewed as ministry, simply because both stem from the same roots and operate from similar platforms. Artists appear on large stages in front of crowds of people singing about their faith. In the same manner, Billy Graham preaches to massive crowds. Artists tour from city to city. Similarly, missionaries travel from village to village sharing their faith and evangelists hold revivals at churches across the country.

Don’t misunderstand, I believe there are Christian artists who are ministers as well, but relatively few are well known within the Christian music industry. I also believe that the innovators of Christian music were solely focused on ministry, to propagate the Gospel through music. But that founding principle has changed radically over the past 25 years.

There was a time when artists held concerts in their local church or high school gym, using their contemporary medium to minister to the gathering. And that hasn’t changed. It’s still common practice for a pastor and his congregation to invite Christian artists to perform in a church, hoping to fill seats and minister to the congregation. However, the artists’ motives for performing have changed dramatically. Formerly, artists either donated their time or were compensated in the same manner as evangelists, by a

collection from the congregation. Today, compensation more often parallels the business requirements of mainstream artists. There are contract riders, which include specifications on stage design, sound systems, lighting rigs, as well as an artist's wish list - from transportation and billing to dressing room accommodations and meals. Plus, money is required to retain the artist for the show. It's more common now to spend \$12 to \$35 for tickets to see a Christian artist perform, than attend a free show held to introduce an audience to the Gospel.

As a teenager I attended concerts at church featuring artists like Dallas Holm and Twila Paris. The congregation welcomed artists for concert events, almost on a monthly basis. But one Sunday morning, the pastor took the pulpit and announced a new church initiative to the congregation. He said he felt an aching in his spirit, witnessing artists and evangelists peddling their goods in the church's foyers and charging people to enter a house of worship; and from that day forward no evangelist, teacher, or musician would make an appearance at the church unless it was on an offerings basis only. Needless to say, the church didn't hold concerts for some years afterward.

The pastor's resolve was consistent with the way he managed the church's business. The congregation gave freely to the church through a couple of offering bins located in each foyer of the sanctuary. There were no plates passed around, and the only mention of tithing or giving to the church was through the pastor's annual teaching series. This church body trusted in faith in a way I'd never seen before nor have seen since. And it was even more impressive that the church was able to raise millions of dollars for missionaries around the world in this manner. The example they set was not lost on one Christian artist.

Carlton Pearson visited this congregation, accompanied by his friend, Contemporary Christian artist Carmen. While I understand that Carmen gets a lot of criticism for his style of music, I genuinely respected his decision to stop charging people to attend his concerts. And it was Carmen's visit to this church that influenced his decision. Carmen's career prospered after he changed his business methods; his shows began filling up auditoriums and even coliseums. Those who attended his concerts freely gave offerings to cover the expenses.

Over the years, I've tried to encourage many Christian artists to move in this

direction. But it takes a lot of faith to work without a safety net, and it seems that very few are willing to take the chance. When Christian music was simply an entertaining way to get people together for the church's purpose of ministry, it was serving its intended purpose. But it no longer serves that purpose and the time to deal with this issue is long overdue. Christian music isn't a ministry it's simply entertainment. Many people in the music industry would agree that Christian music is just an alternative to what is available in mainstream music.

What's most surprising is how blatantly Christian entertainment is passed off as "ministry" in the marketplace. Dare I say what others only whisper? The Christian entertainment industry uses the auspices of ministry as a marketing tool. (Is that a lynch mob banging on my front door?)

The most disturbing part of all this is how susceptible the Christian marketplace is to what's offered. Their face value acceptance is like Little Red Riding Hood's gullibility toward the Big Bad Wolf. The Christian marketplace uses no discernment at all – stick the word "Christian" on anything and it has to be good through and through.

Understand that I'm painting in broad strokes, and by no means do I think Christian music is evil or that all Christian artists are in it for the money (about 10 percent of the artists ever see any real money). However, in its current condition, the Christian music industry is like a house built on sinking sand; the problems that arise continue to mount no matter what is done to fix them. All of the issues and controversy surrounding the Christian music industry stems from its roots; no particular group can be singled out for blame – artists, consumers, radio, or record labels – because everyone involved has contributed to the industry's problems.

Where in the Gospel does it say, "Go out into the world and entertain them!" It doesn't. If Christian music was a ministry it would be non-profit and the record labels would be owned by a variety of church-based organizations rather than EMI and AOL/Time Warner. Is there a need to edify the church body? Yes. But how does Christian music fit into the picture if it's not a ministry?

Christian music is a BUSINESS in every way, shape, and form. It's a group of companies that create a product, package it, then market that product to the consumer. The consumers are the Christian market place. Christian music is a growing business.

Gaylord Entertainment purchased Word Entertainment from Thomas Nelson for \$110 million in 1996. They ended up selling the company to Warner Music Group (WMG) for \$84.1 million in cash in 2001.

According to Soundscan, the company that keeps track of recorded music sales, the Christian/Gospel market sold 45.5 million albums in 2000. That was up 9.2%. In 1985 Gospel music sales totaled \$83 million and over the course of 13 years saw a 940% increase to \$863 million in 1998. Starting a Christian music label is not a bad idea.

In 1998 a Los Angeles research firm ranked Christian music as the sixth highest music preference by music buyers. It's been called the fastest growing genre in the music industry. That same year, according to the National Association of Recording Merchants, for every two Rap albums purchased, someone bought a Christian album.

Wal-mart, K-mart, Best Buy, and a variety of mainstream retail outlets now carry Christian music. I could go on and on but the picture is clear. Christian music is BIG business. And anyone who thinks that Point of Grace getting their tenth number one song is not a big deal for the bottom line of their record label, needs to think again. Artists who make it big in the Christian music industry are rewarded in major ways.

Recognizing that Christian music is not synonymous with ministry is the first step in understanding the need for an ideological revolution in this industry.

### *Chapter Three*

“When are you people going to learn? It's not about who's right or wrong. No denomination's nailed it yet, and they never will because they're all too self-righteous to realize that it doesn't matter what you have faith in, just that you have faith. Your hearts are in the right place, but your brains need to wake up.” – Serendipity, *Dogma*

The diverse belief systems of the Christian community create a wide range of views toward Christian music, with controversy becoming one of the inevitable by-products.

As a branch of the entertainment industry, Christian music has had its share of scandalous stories over the years. Whether it was Michael English scamming drugs from local doctors in Nashville, or Sandi Patty's extramarital affair, the news media reported it and the gossip ensued. Unfortunately, strong doctrinal differences have often turned mere gossip into durable controversy within the Christian community.

The very public divorce of Gary Chapman and Amy Grant some years ago has become a stereotype. Shortly thereafter, the first lady of Contemporary Christian music married country superstar Vince Gill. Chapman eventually remarried as well. And the rumors about this poor couple have circulated throughout Nashville's homes, businesses and nightspots for as long as I can remember.

With today's technology, controversial issues are discussed daily on Internet message boards. One site has a section devoted to the Christian music industry, where users who work in this field can share their views. A selection of recent postings, regarding the Grant controversy, depicts the on-going difference of opinions. One user posted the following message after viewing a 'snaps' page (where pictures sent in from record labels and radio stations are posted):

“I looked in the snaps page and I see a photo of Amy Grant and Vince Gill. How can anybody even associate Amy with the Christian realm? Let's not forget her infidelity to Gary Chapman. I thought most Christian stations had pulled her music. If you haven't, how can you not? How are we setting an example? We might as well be like the mainstream if we don't draw a line.”

The following replies were posted to the message above:

“Repentance, restoration, forgiveness... It's what makes our relationship with Jesus possible. None of us would be given the privilege to serve in Christian Media if we went by what we deserved. There was a time of accountability and healing Amy went through with the help of elders in her life and in the industry. None of us deserve a second chance, but Jesus uses us anyway as we submit our hearts and lives to him for restoration in repentance. To me, her return symbolizes the awesome grace and mercy of our Lord. Praise God! It encourages me.”

“If we limit our ‘association’ to those who haven't sinned... we would have no one to associate with. There would be no artists to play, no pictures to post, no radio listeners, no radio personnel... not one left.”

”Concerning Amy... I don't know her, nor anyone involved. The information I've heard has come from all kinds of sources. I'm just thankful they're not broadcasting the details of all our lives.”

My own reaction to any controversy involving Grant is simply, “who cares.” I've got better things to do than worry about Grant wearing a smoking jacket on the cover of an album or contemplating whether the man she was bouncing around with on some video was her husband. What the preceding discussion of controversy hopes to convey is simply this: the more important issue of working toward a unified standard for Christian music has been obscured by petty bickering within the Christian community.

Christianity is a religion with a wide variety of belief systems, and each person's relationship with his or her Lord brings a certain loss of objectivity in perspective. Salvation in the Christian faith is a very personal matter. Religion has long been part of our world's culture, dating back to the very beginning. Researchers have shown that the need for humanity to believe in a “higher-power” is quite compelling. Missionaries often confirm this theory when they relay stories of visiting an isolated tribe that has never been exposed to any type of religion. Yet these missionaries state the tribe has built a sanctuary in their village and the citizens worship a yam or coconut or something.

It's this innate driving force within us that solidifies the personal relationship salvation brings in the Christian faith. One's faith and relationship with their creator is

often more intense than a person's relationship within their family circle. And in the beginning of a person's walk in the Christian faith, the soul is a blank slate. The path chosen for the individual's doctrinal upbringing eventually determines how they view everything in life.

Stated in another way, the basis for life consists of four parts: the body, mind, soul and spirit; the spirit being the part that works on the spiritual level. So the spirit is just as important as the mind or body. One's spirit is present all of the time, helping to make choices and moral decisions. It's in touch with the surrounding world, advising through awareness at a spiritual level. Seeing the spirit in this light reveals how faith plays an integral role in each person's actions and views.

The problem is that man is innately flawed. Give mankind a perfectly good idea and man's nature is bound to tinker with it until it breaks. And basically that's what's happened with Christianity. The message of the Christian faith is simple: God is love. It's by God's grace that you are saved through faith and it's a gift from Him. That's Christianity in a nutshell. Now put man's nature in the picture. Hundreds of years after it's inception, a variety of denominations and religious beliefs exist, each proclaiming that their way is the right way and everyone else is wrong.

Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Lutheran, Amish, Mormon, Jehovah-Witness, Holiness Pentecostal, the Church of the First Born And Still Wet Behind The Ears - the Gospel has been theorized and categorized to death. And there are even divisions among the divisions. Southern Baptists, Independent Baptists, Free Will Baptists, Non-Denominational Baptists, My Momma Was A Baptist And You Ain't... Sometimes I wonder how we function as a society.

Each person in any particular offshoot of the Christian faith has their own set of rules, by which they live and affect their culture. How a Catholic views the world is vastly different than how a Holiness Pentecostal does. A Catholic will smoke, chew and go with girls that do, while the latter will wear no make-up, never cut their hair and never be seen out of a full-length dress. Imagine how these two people view Christian music: The Catholic could probably care less and might be found listening to Metallica, while the Holiness Pentecostal only listens to the Gaither Vocal Band.

In the previous examples regarding Amy Grant's divorce, each of the individuals

who posted their thoughts on the message board had a particular viewpoint based on the doctrine of their faith. And it's for this very reason that after 25 years, Christian music can still cause controversy in the church. One person says, "music with a beat is evil," while another says, "Dancing is bad for the soul;" the next person says, "The lifestyle of the artist is primary," while another insists, "The music must be blatantly about Christ."

The audience catered to by the Christian music industry is, absolutely, one of the hardest places to market on a mass scale. I have first-hand knowledge about marketing to Christians, having done it most of my life. I've received countless phone calls, at one Christian radio station or another, about a particular artist that we were playing. While one praised our efforts, another cursed us to the bottomless pit. Marketing to Christians is like trying to be all things to all people to the tenth degree. That's why a majority of the music produced by the industry is wimpy, easy going, middle of the road, adult contemporary pabulum — simply because it's safe. And it's easily marketable to a broad audience. While some on the fringes of the Christian faith may frown, generally no one has any issues with Sierra, Avalon or Mark Schultz.

In this environment, it's easy to see why people express adamant opinions about Christian artists crossing over into the mainstream. Many will ask, "Are they still Christians?" A typical exchange on this subject would be:

"I heard a P.O.D. song on our local rock station."

"Well, you shouldn't have been listening to that station anyway and you're going straight to hell for it! Don't you know they're brainwashing you with sex, drugs and that evil jungle beat?"

One of the small Christian stations I worked at sponsored a concert with Rich Mullins at a local church. When I checked the back to see if he and his sidekick were ready to start the show, he was smoking a cigarette outside the back door of the church. At that time in my Christian walk, I had a very set point of view on drinking and smoking, like many people do. Based on an individual's beliefs, the issue might be considered a stumbling block to the body of Christ or that it's acceptable in moderation. Like any other issue discussed within the Christian community, viewpoints are heavily influenced by subjectivity.

I've heard just about everything imaginable: Individuals upset about mainstream

record labels operating in the Christian market; people griping about Rich Mullins smoking before a show; and even why the Target retail chain should not create it's own music section for Christian recordings. When it comes to spiritual issues, every individual is driven to see things done in a manner that appropriately evokes their doctrine, because they believe their way is the right way.

What I find even more amazing is how little the general public knows about the industry. It's been said jokingly, between Nashville natives, that anyone who moved to "Nashvegas" and lived here for a year would become totally disillusioned with the Christian music industry.

Due to this wide variety of beliefs, one has to boil things down to the basics. Discard all spiritual prejudices concerning the Christian music industry and what's left is just a small branch of the music business. That's it, there's really nothing very spiritual about it. Personal preference then boils down to musical taste and a preferred style of entertainment, which includes music genre, lyrical content, artist appreciation, etc.

Herein lies the next step in the revolutionary ideology. Once the Christian community can come to terms with their individual diversity, the topography of the Church will be clearly visible. It's an understanding of diversity that leads to unity; and unity in any body of thought or belief becomes a strong frontline in its common goal or purpose.

## *Chapter Four*

"This so-called new religion is nothing but a pack of weird rituals and chants designed to take away the money of fools. Now let us say the Lord's prayer 40 times, but first let's pass the collection plate." - Rev. Lovejoy, *The Simpsons*

All anyone really knows about the entertainment business is what he or she sees or hears about the product. While the mainstream music audience is saturated with news about its artists, Christian music fans are limited to whatever slant best serves their own mini-industry. In the mainstream market there is a wealth of media outlets running back stories – from local radio stations to E! Entertainment Television. Some call it “spin control.” The Christian music industry has long been in control of how it's perceived in the marketplace, simply because there have been no other resources available. Christian music fans are entitled to an in-depth view of their artists, so I'll pull back the curtain for a better view: Few contemporary Christian artists pursue their chosen career for “ministry.” They simply have a career in music, not a “calling,” and would rather be successful mainstream artists. While Christian music fans may not recognize this, corporate leaders in mainstream music do.

In 2001 there was a panel discussion held during Gospel Music Week in Nashville hosted by John Styll (CCM Communications) featuring panelists John Fischer (Columnist), Jim Van Hook (Provident Music Group), Bill Hearn (EMI/CMG), Malcolm Mims (Word Entertainment), and Frank Breedan (President of GMA).

For over an hour these captains of the industry commented on the state of the Christian music industry. Most of the discussions led to the topic of mainstream companies invading the Christian music marketplace. The biggest selling albums that year came from Yolanda Adams, P.O.D., Plus One and Anne Murray, all of whom were on mainstream labels. While Hearn stated that the industry was primed for this type of invasion, another panelist called CCM the “worship” music of today. The following highlights several key statements made during this round table discussion:

Fischer, once a musician himself, had insight on the genre as a whole saying, “I think one of our primary motivations at the beginning was to save the world. Someone

once said Phil Keaggy could have saved the world with his guitar... After about two years, Christian music became what it is, Christian music, and the world got what we were doing. Then we were creating music for ourselves... I think the current trends are the best thing that's happening for the Gospel. We always wanted our music to get into mainstream bookstores and now it is. It's doing more for getting the message of the Gospel out than it ever has... The world is prejudice against Christians as a political power and culture, but they're not prejudice against Jesus or the truth and definitely not prejudice against spirituality."

When asked what happens if the music doesn't sell Van Hook said, "When you start taking risks, you have to anticipate a bigger return... The Backstreet Boys had sold 54 million units, which is more like 57 million globally." Styll stated that number to be what the entire Christian music industry had sold that year.

In response to the question of the industry once being more ministry driven, Hearn said, "We are bottom line driven, we have a heavy emphasis on being profitable... I will never apologize for being a good businessman. I will never apologize for being profitable. It's the only way to succeed in the music business today."

But the most compelling statement came from Malcolm Mims who said, "You know why some people are in the Christian music business? They can't make it anywhere else... Most Christian artists would rather be pop artists if given the choice, but they don't have a choice." That is the absolute, 100% truth, coming from a man who was once the president of the most successful Christian label in Nashville.

Amy Grant and Michael W. Smith were getting heat from the body of Christ for their crossover appeal in the '80s, but they blazed new territory in the mindset of Christian music: that Christian artists are generally just regular folks who happen to be Christians. They are people that have a desire to make musical art and thus do so, but they are not especially "called" to go into their given career, it's just a desire to do so. Like a child who wishes to become a policeman, fireman or astronaut, these individuals have dreams of success in the music field.

Does every Christian feel a special "calling" to their career? Of course not. They don't dream of becoming Christian secretaries or Christian dentists, they're just

secretaries and dentists who happen to be Christians. That's how a majority of Christian artists view themselves. They work in the Christian music industry because that's where they can get work. They do see the benefit their music has on the Christian marketplace in the form of touching people's lives; but many, if they had the choice, would rather work in the mainstream market doing the same thing. I've had countless conversations with artists who want to break into the mainstream. Many see it as a way to propagate the Gospel on a massive level, while others don't even recognize the artists who are currently doing it.

For example, Lenny Kravitz is a Christian who often puts material on his albums that reflect his faith. His statements of faith are more direct and obvious than the vague lyrical references often found in some Christian music. Read some of his lyrics: If you could feel what I could feel / Well then you'd know His love is real / If you could hear what I could hear / Well then you'd know the King is near / The resurrection is here to stay / And He's coming back again / To reclaim all His souls and set us free. ("The Resurrection" – *Circus*)

Kravitz is doing more to propagate the Gospel than 30 of the top selling Christian artists combined. Here are the lyrics to another song: God is love / Through all your trials and tribulations / God is love / He'll get you through all situations / God is love / And if you are ready He always is ready for you / God loves everyone / That's why He gave His Son / And you should feel His pain / Yet He gave us everything. ("God Is Love" – *Circus*)

Generally, the impact Christian artists have on our culture has been overrated. For instance, the rock band Bleach only sold approximately 40,000 copies of their self-entitled album on Forefront Records, and Bleach is probably considered to be a core artist in the Christian rock genre. Compare that to artists like P.O.D. who recently went triple platinum with their album "Satellite." That recognizes their album selling more than three million copies, which shows the vast difference in potential reach.

Christian artists are just like everyone else, they want to do what they love to do and be successful at it while maintaining their morals. But it's also important to understand that making music is their profession. They are people trying to make a living. Some will do just about anything to get a paycheck, and sometimes the face of ministry is used to achieve that goal.

For instance, during a concert a well-known Christian artist will take the time to promote their sponsorship of a “feed the children in a third world country foundation.” The artist gets a cut from every person that signs up to support that foundation, and can make up to \$100 for each person who participates. Imagine a group like Avalon signing up 50,000 people to sponsor a child during their fall tour: The group could earn \$500,000 dollars.

Christian artists can make \$500 to \$35,000 for a live performance, that’s the reason artists tour. It’s really their bread and butter. In the mainstream those figures are substantially higher. At last count, P.O.D. was getting more than \$80,000 a show. That’s for about four hours of work. Sometimes I think I’m in the wrong business.

So, how is Christian music different than mainstream music? I don’t see any differences other than lyrical content. It’s just a business, and businesses operate to make a profit not minister to people; ministry is just a coincidence. This fact is in plain view and it’s time for members of this industry, as well as its consumers, to deal with it.

The average Christian consumer sees through the eyes of the church, and views Christian music as a means of forwarding the message of the Gospel. Their tunnel vision creates this common misconception. Why shouldn’t consumers buy an album from Jessica Simpson, if they are seeking a positive alternative to Britney Spears? Simpson is just as clean and pure-natured as Rachel Lampa. The reason is, most consumers don’t have the ability to discern the difference. They’ve been brainwashed by the Christian music industry into thinking that if it has a Christian music label on it, it must be okay. If consumers realized that Tooth & Nail Records doesn’t necessarily sign purely Christian acts, imagine their predicament at the Christian bookstore, wondering if they should buy a Juliana Theory CD. Getting the drift?

People are people and it doesn’t matter if they’re a carpenter, computer programmer, mayor or Christian artist, they are bound to be flawed and bound to make mistakes. The question is “Where is the consumers’ discernment in the whole matter?” Do Christian music labels use and abuse their tactics under the auspices of “ministry?” Yes, they do. They hold to the claim they are propagating the Gospel, but in my opinion they are simply pimping out Jesus. The question really is “What’s the difference between purchasing a golden cross key chain from Robert Tilton’s ministry, or purchasing the

latest release from FFH from Essential Records?” Consumers spend their hard-earned cash for both.

Understanding the Christian community’s misconceptions of the Christian music industry is the third step in the revolutionary ideology. The need for dramatic change becomes clearer as the industry’s problems come into focus.

## *Chapter Five*

"Nothing separates the generations more than music. By the time a child is eight or nine, he has developed a passion for his own music that is even stronger than his passions for procrastination and weird clothes." - Bill Cosby

How does the Christian community define the term "positive alternative?" From my experience, the community wants a wholesome picture in which an artist's image and song lyrics provide entertainment acceptable to their indoctrinated beliefs. But neither Christian artists nor Christian record labels are required to apply any faith-based guidelines in the making, imaging, or marketing of their product.

So why do Christians seek out "Christian" music? Is it because the listening audience simply *assumes* that Christian music represents better moral projections than mainstream music? If so, they've failed to consider how the profit-driven nature of business affects the product they're buying. It starts with the music industry's common practice of following trends. This practice has become firmly entrenched in the niche business of Christian music, but the trends rippling through Christian music originate in mainstream. Trendy imitation is profitable to the industry, but this practice creates an increasingly disturbing contradiction between the Christian community's view of a "positive alternative" and what is offered to fill that need.

Whether Christian music fans are unaware or indifferent, the industry's philosophy is quite clear. During the 2001 Gospel Music Week round-table session featuring label executives, Bill Hearn (EMI/CMG) noted the following: "Part of that dual responsibility we have is to resource the church. I worked at a Christian retail store for two days at Christmas this year. The church needs alternatives to pop music... Parents would come into this store (I sat there for 16 hours over two days) saying, 'My kids listen to Britney Spears, Backstreet Boys. What can I buy them that's more Christian?' It's not that they weren't going to let them listen to that, but they need something else. 'What do I buy?' We say you buy Plus One, Rachael Lampa, Stacie Orrico, Zoe Girl, and they would buy all four and be out the door."

Hearn went on to say, “All music is trendy and following. It’s all derivative of something else. Ya’know Creed sounds like Matchbox 20, sounds like Lifehouse. We’re in a trendy business... And the original stuff comes out and makes it’s mark and then a bunch of people follow it... I never apologize when people say Stacie Orrico is just like Britney Spears. Absolutely!”

The industry’s stance that Christian music resources the church is an imaginative twist of the concept that ministry is subjective. In my opinion, if one of the industry’s prime directives is to resource the church, then record labels would package their products and send them to churches across the country on a love-offering basis.

For those in search of a “positive alternative,” the dilemma presented is obvious. Hearn’s remarks offer a typical example: He was pleased that “people say Stacie Orrico is just like Britney Spears.” But talking to parents in a bookstore, he suggested Orrico as an alternative to Spears when the parents asked his recommendation for something “more Christian.” If those parents had heard the record label executives’ round-table discussion, perhaps they would have asked a more pertinent question. Such as: If there is no remarkable difference between the image and sound of a Christian artist and his or her mainstream model, then why is the Christian artist considered an “alternative?”

In any business, following trends is just a euphemism for taking the fast track to profit. Knock-off handbags and generic store brands share a common denominator with music designed to follow a trend. They are copies designed to make money from their deliberate likeness to a popular original, without expending the development costs required by the original. Why is this important to generation-gapped parents searching for alternative wholesome music for their children? Simply this: When a Christian artist is designed for resemblance to a popular mainstream artist, what’s being duplicated may be the very qualities that the unwitting parents are trying to avoid.

To those who think my viewpoint is radical I say, “Hogwash!” Parents looking for a “positive alternative” to a mainstream artist, who doesn’t portray a suitable image to their children, should do some research. The reason being, because many Christian artists are no different than mainstream artists. The only difference is in the marketing behind the image of the Christian artists. They are people who have just as many faults as mainstream artists, but the market Christian artists cater to doesn’t approve of certain

kinds of moral projections. If Britney Spears jumping around in little outfits and shaking her hips isn't acceptable, parents could choose an album by Christian artist, Nikki Leonti, as a "positive alternative" for their children. And depending on their beliefs, Ms. Leonti's pregnancy out of wedlock may or may not present a doctrinal dilemma.

The practice of following, rather than setting, a music trend has frustrated me for years. I spent my youth listening exclusively to Christian music. During those years it never occurred to me to question whether or not the music was original. I just assumed it was. But that naïve assumption evaporated with my first job in mainstream radio, where spinning song after song by popular mainstream artists revealed that some of my favorite Christian groups had merely captured the sound of other artists.

I've often wondered, when did the music industry lose the notion that music is an art form? Has the industry forgotten what the term "artist" means? Throughout the history of the music business there has been a steady stream of people who tried to cash-in on their ability to look and sound like popular, original artists. Of those that made it into the spotlight many had only one hit song, two if they were lucky, then faded away. Basically, they were performers not talented artists. It takes inspiration, creativity, knowledge, and talent to be a great artist. And that is what's desperately lacking in the Christian music industry. In my opinion, this is the reason why the Christian music industry always seems five years behind the mainstream. The pursuit of money has clouded the industry's perspective, by giving the fast track to profit a much higher priority than the slower process of creativity.

By viewing the relationship between the makers of Christian music and its target market through their common link, the "positive alternative," it should be apparent that the needs of business and religion has created a marriage of opposites. It functions despite its contradictions and will last so long as the Christian community accepts what is offered without questioning what lies beneath the surface.

Scrutinizing what's offered as a "positive alternative" is the next step in understanding the need to revolutionize Christian music.

## *Chapter Six*

“The media's the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power. Because they control the minds of the masses.” – Malcolm X

It would be a sin if I didn't address issues facing Christian radio, having spent a career in the radio business. For those who work in Christian radio, consider this “fair warning.” The truth hurts, and though many will agree with me in private, they will never admit it in public.

People often wonder why they cannot find a “good” Christian radio station in their market. Well, it's simple. Generally, Christian radio is sub-par. Out of the 40 odd reporting Christian radio stations in the country, two or three are professional, and I'm being generous.

Anyone can test this point in his or her local market. From a pure entertainment standpoint, compare the execution and professionalism of the Christian music station to all the other mainstream radio stations. Very few can stand toe to toe with their mainstream competitors, mainly because Christian stations are staffed with unqualified personnel. A majority of Christian radio station owners, managers, and on-air personalities have little or no mainstream radio experience, but I think it should be a prerequisite.

To turn a mundane Christian radio job into a successful career, there is no better training ground than the highly competitive business of mainstream radio. In that environment, each station tries to win a market share because that's what advertising sales are based on. If a station doesn't provide a superior product they will capture little or no market share and be unable to generate revenue from advertising. But if the station ranks among the leaders, the rewards are tremendous. Excellence is paramount in mainstream radio. In contrast, many Christian stations are listener-supported organizations. They are not motivated to strive for excellence because their alternate income reduces the pressure to compete for advertising sales gained through market

shares.

If those who want to work in Christian radio spent some time in the mainstream market learning from the original, their acquired skills could be applied to shape Christian stations into a product comparable to the mainstream. But, generally, this simple logic is seldom practiced. Instead, most Christians start their radio career at a Christian station and never leave that microcosm. The result is an endless cycle of newcomers being trained by people with no bona fide radio experience. It's like making a photocopy from a photocopy of a photocopy... the result gets worse with every generation.

The current condition of Christian radio is the direct result of its lack of professionalism and knowledge of the craft. That's also why 90 percent of the Christian radio stations in the country cannot even pull a 'one share' in their market. It's not because they play Christian music, it's because the product is inferior and the audience knows it. Listeners don't express their preferences technically, "That station's imaging is top notch," or "The production library sounds 20 years old;" they can't describe why the programming isn't likeable or why the radio personalities annoy them, but they can tell a station they don't like it's sound. And trust me, the 10 percent of Christian stations that do know their craft have the ratings to prove it.

While many of those employed in Christian radio would privately concede this point, few are willing to swallow their pride and spend some time learning from the best – veteran mainstream professionals. Each year during GMA Week in Nashville, there is a track of educational seminars specifically for radio broadcasters; and every year it continues to amaze me that most of the speakers have never worked outside of Christian radio. I'll admit I rarely attend the lectures about programming, etc., because the topics are limited to fundamental tools I learned years ago in mainstream radio. And, frankly, re-learning the ABC's is just plain boring.

For its 2001 convention, the committee selecting seminar speakers hired a mainstream consultant to advise them about their choice of lecturers. It seemed someone finally had the right idea. But whom did they choose to teach some of their classes? Someone the mainstream industry had little respect for. I attended one of his classes on developing a web site for a radio station. In his first statement he said "If your web site has text over a colored background, change it. You're an idiot. All web pages should be

black text on a white background.” I got up and walked out. That man knew about as much about the Internet as my dog does.

I’ve decided that 2002 will be my final year to attend GMA Week. Each year, around the same time, the National Association of Broadcasters (the mainstream industry) holds their annual conference in Las Vegas, Nevada. I believe it would be of greater benefit to attend that convention rather than GMA week. Why try to learn from a substandard medium when I can learn from the best in the world? Makes sense doesn’t it?

Although my opinion of Christian radio’s technical merits is clearly negative, I want to make it clear that there are numerous people, with incredible hearts, who shouldn’t be blamed for following station policy. The average station employee subsists on very low wages. A person has to feel a special “tug” in their spirit to work at a Christian radio station, rather than use their talents to pursue a lucrative career in mainstream radio. These worker bees, who have no authority to change station policy, do what they can to propagate the Gospel with the limited resources and education available to them. But, like the station owners and managers, they lack the openness to learn how to do their jobs better. And that is disheartening. Just as doctors occasionally take courses on the latest advances in medicine, Christian radio broadcasters should constantly learn how to improve their product. The better the product the more listeners they attract; and the greater the audience, the further the kingdom of God is advanced.

But Christian radio stubbornly keeps its blinders on. The average station tries to sound like it’s more than just entertainment but I know, from personal experience, there is very little ministry going on at most Christian radio stations. If Christian radio thinks their broadcasts are reaching a lost and dying world they are sorely mistaken, because non-believers aren’t listening to Christian music, or the radio stations that play it. Mainstream radio defines the type of music an individual primarily listens to as a “lifestyle” format. By that definition, Christian radio should be the ultimate lifestyle format, but it isn’t.

At present, only corporate-owned stations are working to provide a positive alternative to mainstream music. There is a vast difference between what they offer and the broadcast quality of other Christian stations. These companies are creating Christian stations with the imaging of a positive, family friendly format and impacting their local markets. But they are few and far between.

With a concerted effort, Christian radio stations can acquire the technical expertise to become a more palatable entertainment medium, but that doesn't resolve the larger issue: the need for Christians to conduct business in accordance with the higher standards of our faith.

It's common throughout many denominations in the Christian faith to abide by a standard that is higher than those held outside the faith. This standard of excellence is often discussed by many pastors and teachers within our community. It's the notion that Christians should live and work with a higher standard to represent their faith in the proper manner. Yet, sadly, this is far from the truth in our church culture.

If Christian radio doesn't learn these and other important lessons soon, the industry is going to miss a valuable opportunity to propagate the Gospel. The radio industry is changing radically and rapidly. Consolidation in mainstream radio has limited the diversity of music once found in the marketplace and new technology is changing the medium every year. The ability to reach a mass audience with the Gospel will be possible in ways it's never been seen before in the near future.

Where will Christian radio be in this new frontier of broadcasting? It's my hope that the Christian radio industry will learn that affecting our culture isn't always about putting teaching and preaching programs on their station, or playing overtly Christian music for the church. Radio outlets should make themselves a relevant part of their business medium and not only relevant to the church body.

Recognizing that Christian radio must strive for excellence to overcome its current deficiencies is the next step in understanding the need for revolutionary changes.

## *Chapter Seven*

"I may never win another Dove award, and I may never get played on Christian radio again, but that's not why I do this." – Wayne Kirkpatrick

Sharing faith through music should be its own reward. But the industry of Christian music needed something more... And another glitzy awards ceremony was added to the entertainment world.

I think author Steve Turner said it best during an interview, "If Gospel music is regarded as a Christian ministry, then there shouldn't be awards given for it, just as you wouldn't award someone for praying a great prayer or preaching a great sermon."

I couldn't agree more. Christians shouldn't require the motivation of a reward system to share their faith. And this irony is one of the reasons why the Dove Awards have attracted so much ridicule from its own industry. Another reason is reflected in Malcom Mims' remarks during the Gospel Music Week's 2001 panel discussion. Mims plainly stated that some people are in the Christian music business "because they can't make it anywhere else" and that "most Christian artists would rather be pop artists if given the choice, but they don't have the choice." It doesn't take much imagination to see how giving awards to some of those second-rate mainstream wannabe's provides a lot of new material for derision.

Given my views about today's Christian music, it won't come as a surprise that I see the Dove Awards as just another resource for industry profit. Throughout the music industry, award ceremonies draw free advertising from media attention and award winners boost sales for their record labels. If the Dove Awards were created to primarily serve business interests, then this event has hit its mark. However, if the Dove Awards are supposed to honor notable original talent and significant achievements in sharing faith through music, I think it's missed the mark by miles.

As a member of the Gospel Music Association, I spent a couple of frustrating years as a voting member in the Dove Awards process. Christian music fans that watch this event on television merely see the results of this process. To gain a better

perspective, I think the fans deserve a behind the scenes look as how this selection process really works.

There is no nominating committee of wise, old music oracles to assure objective, industry-wide representation. The nomination process begins with the record labels. Those that wish to participate select and place material in the various categories for approval. If a record label doesn't participate, its artists, songs, and albums are automatically excluded from the process. An initial ballot is made up and sent to members who then vote for their choices. The results are tabulated to produce a list of nominees, which is sent to the membership. The members vote for their choice of winners in each category. When the final results are tabulated the winners have been selected.

Since this whole process is based on candidates submitted by record labels, logical minds might wonder if there is a criterion to govern their choices. And the answer to that would be "no." The Gospel Music Association redefined the criteria for Christian music in 1997. Their definition states: "Gospel music is music in any style whose lyric is substantially based upon historically orthodox Christian truth contained in or derived from the Holy Bible; and/or an expression of worship of God or praise for His works; and/or testimony of relationship with God through Christ; and/or obviously prompted and informed by a Christian worldview." This ruling has had no apparent influence on the Dove Awards process. It has, however, caused more separation among believers. Inside the industry, excessive time and energy has been wasted on socio-religious sub-points not essential to the all-important propagation of the Gospel.

The awards selection process is not based on performance of record sales, or weeks at number one on the radio charts; it's purely at the whim of the participants. To further complicate things, many voting members know they aren't qualified to judge music talent, but that deficiency doesn't cause much concern because industry politics and favoritism often influence their choices. So the final results are more indicative of a "personality contest" than "talent awards," with the deserving party in each category often walking away empty handed.

I'm always amazed at whom the record labels choose to represent their companies in each category. It's as though they passed the chore down to an intern. By their inclusions they determine what is considered to be specific to the genre. They might put

some pop artist with a bit of a rockin' tune into the rap category; or put an urban artist's album into the adult contemporary category, just because. A glaring example of this categorical mismatch was Carmen winning Rap/Hip Hop Recorded Song of the Year for "R.I.O.T." *Carmen...?* Who was smoking crack when they nominated Carmen?

In contrast, the group P.O.D. is an example of unrecognized achievement. This all-Christian band entered the mainstream market, unwavering, and made more of an impact for the Gospel than all of Christian music combined in the last five years. They were featured on MTV, toured with Ozzy Osbourne, and went triple platinum with their latest record. At the 2001 Dove Awards they were nominated for Group of the Year, Artist of the Year and much more. But the band is so disappointed with the Christian music industry they didn't bother to attend the awards ceremony.

In an *Entertainment Today* interview with Sonny Sandoval, the front man for P.O.D., he was asked the following question: "How do you feel about the Gospel Music Association taking an interest in your career now that they can claim you to be another of their platinum selling acts?" Sandoval replied, "That's all the politics. It's like the same people that banned us, now they're in their little meetings and stuff and they're like our goal is to help P.O.D. break into the mainstream. No it's not. Let's be honest with ourselves, that's not your hearts intention. You're just selling records. Whatever link you have to P.O.D. it looks good on your plate." Preach it Sonny!

When asked what happened at the Dove Awards Sandoval said, "You can't stop them from nominating you and we were like, 'What are we going to do?' We were nominated more than like anybody because they saw all the mainstream stats and then they're like, 'Wow! Look at what we've done. Look at what we've accomplished.' Our whole thing was that we sent our fan base and we sent them to the Dove Awards to accept any award we get. It was funny because we told the GMA; this is what we're going to do. It was like, 'Thank you, but P.O.D. is in the studio and we can't show up so this is what we're going to do in case we win anything. We're going to have a bunch of kids accept it for us and say what they want to say and speak from their hearts.' They weren't down with that and we're like, 'What's the big deal?' (The fans) went and we didn't win anything. Again, it was politics. It was like, 'Oh, P.O.D. doesn't want to show up to our little event, well we'll see.' We got feedback from all the kids that we sent and they were

like, ‘So this is what you guys go through all the time?’ We’re not trying to be a part of this little... it’s almost like a secret society type thing. It’s like thank you for anything you might have done in the past, thank you for your support, no disrespect, but we’re going to go on and do what we want to do.”

In my opinion Sonny is right on the mark. The point is to propagate the Gospel with the abilities one possesses. As a group of guys who are simply a band, P.O.D.’s career exemplifies this. Their talent resides in music so they create music, good music, and it’s accepted on a broad scale. It hasn’t changed their beliefs, they aren’t ordained ministers, but they epitomize author Bob Briner’s concept of “roaring lambs.” Their faith is shared through their success in this medium, yet the GMA has not recognized P.O.D.’s widespread positive influence, much less the quality of their work.

Some may wonder why I’ve taken issue with something as trivial as awards ceremonies. The reason is simply to highlight the need for greater awareness in the Christian market place. The mere existence of a defining criterion for Christian music creates the seductive illusion of product compliance which, in turn, implies that those who win awards for Christian music possess the ultimate seal of approval.

Christian music fans need to take a long, hard look behind the industry’s curtain every time an opportunity is presented, and question anything that doesn’t seem suitable to their faith. When the Christian community realizes it needs to learn how to distinguish between what truly represents their faith and what is just an illusion, they have taken the final step in understanding the need for revolutionary changes in the Christian music industry.

## *Chapter Eight*

"There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, nor perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than the introduction of a new order of things, because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new." — Niccolò Machiavelli

Armed with their buying power, Christian music consumers have the ability to revolutionize Christian music! Consumer buying trends are a powerful force in any marketplace. The simple act of purchasing, or not purchasing, determines the fate of any product. Consumers must learn to scrutinize the industry's products, rather than assume what's offered is an authentic "positive alternative." A new battle cry, "*Let the Seller Beware!*" will be heard throughout the industry when the Christian community starts wielding their cash, checkbooks, and credit cards against the fortress of commercial profiteers.

Every Christian music listener must learn how to 'think outside the box' of their doctrinal beliefs. The old notion of, "If it isn't stamped Christian, it can't be good" is as useless today as the passive, herd-mentality that accepts record labels' promotional claims that Christian music serves the church.

Christian music, in its current state, is nothing more than a form of entertainment, a luxury item. Along with 200 channels of cable television and high speed Internet access, Christian music is not a necessity of life. Christians seeking a "positive alternative" to mainstream music need to realize there are plenty of clean positive artists in the mainstream industry. The average consumer may be surprised by how many of these artists are Christians. A "positive alternative" in music can be found by using discernment. For those unfamiliar with mainstream music, take a few minutes and do a little research. Why settle for a second rate copy that is simply stamped "Christian" when the original is readily available?

I know that many Christians don't listen to mainstream music at all, due to their various indoctrinated beliefs. But discernment provides options. When I listen to Pearl Jam, I know what I'm getting and I can still appreciate the musical art created on each of

their albums. I may not agree with everything they have to say lyrically, but I can use my own judgment and choose what to enjoy and what to simply ignore. What a concept! And if that contradicts someone's spiritual philosophy, there are plenty of artists in the market who consistently offer music acceptable to any doctrine, such as: Lenny Kravitz, Mary J. Blige, Lauryn Hill, MxPx, Lifehouse, Gary Cherone (Extreme, Van Halen & Tribe of Judah), U2, P.O.D., Johnny Cash, Destiny's Child, T-Bone Burnett, and many others.

What if someone wants music that specifically glorifies the Lord? Well, yes that is another matter. I believe that praise and worship music, and other church oriented genres, are produced specifically to edify the body of Christ. But, remember, it's not a resource for the church in the current industry model. It's produced, manufactured and marketed for profit.

Human nature is full of irony. People make fun of television evangelists selling John The Baptist lawn chairs or Doubting Thomas beach towels, yet they'll purchase any number of Christian products from their local Christian bookstore. And the issue of consumer folly is not limited to the Christian music industry.

Each year the Christian Booksellers Association (CBA) holds a massive convention for Christian retailers. The CBA is an international trade association of Christian product suppliers and retailers. It serves more than 2,500 member retail stores in the United States and more than 1,000 stores in 40 international countries, with member chapters in 16 countries worldwide. These stores provide Bibles, Christian books, curriculum, apparel, music, videos, gifts, greeting cards, children's resources, and other materials. CBA also serves 625 member publishers, record companies, gift companies, and other resource suppliers.

In 2001, I attended my first CBA convention in Atlanta, held at the Georgia International Convention Center. Although I have visited a Christian bookstore more than once, I was shocked to see the massive expo floor (which stretched from one end of the convention center to the other) filled with literally hundreds and hundreds of booths.

People from around the world had flocked to peruse and purchase the latest Christian merchandise. Practically everything imaginable was available: Jesus peanuts (that's really what they were called); Christian Bible trading cards, featuring Bible characters with statistics on the back; Jesus yo-yo's; Jesus tennis shoes, with the name of

Christ on the side of the shoe; Jesus breath mints, better known as Testamints; Jesus candy with scriptures on the wrappers; Jesus apparel, which is actually a big seller; Jesus jewelry; Jesus comic books; Christian stationary; Christian greeting cards; Christian pens; Christian watches featuring the cross on one of the timepieces hands; Christian statues; Christian wall art; Christian sunglasses; Christian coffee mugs, and that was just one third of the convention floor. If it was imprinted with “Christian” and money could be made on it, it was there in not just one color, but every color of the spectrum.

I have to be honest, after two full days of walking the convention floor, legs weak and heels blistered, I was disturbed deep down in my spirit. I understand Christian business and I appreciate the need to resource the church, but this was truly ridiculous.

There was a time when Christian bookstores sold only Bibles and some books on a variety of subjects involving faith. But now, they’re Big Business, with a multitude of retail chain stores producing tons of “Christian” products for the marketplace. What was once a reliable resource to fill a need is now insanely out of control.

There’s nothing wrong with a Christian-owned business catering to Christians. In fact I’m a Christian businessman who constantly encourages others to be entrepreneurial. It’s a wonderful thing! But why must we stamp Jesus’ name on the product to sell it? Is it really necessary to sell sandals that imprint “Jesus Loves You” along on the beach? Why not just sell quality sandals, expand the business and become successful in the apparel industry? Faith will shine through success and be a testimony to everyone who sees it. (And in this case wears it.) Over the long term, it will serve as an outstanding example for the Gospel.

The WWJD (What Would Jesus Do) fad from several years ago has degenerated with time. I recently saw a “WWJD for a Klondike Bar” shirt offered by an on-line retailer. I enjoy a good joke as much as anyone and Christians are certainly entitled to a sense of humor. But this is just one more example of how the pursuit of money has transformed the original message into a profitable joke that encourages the world to ridicule, rather than revere, religion.

Today’s Christian music industry is as unnecessary to the everyday lives of Christian consumers as any other product mentioned here. The industry has not filled the needs of the Christian community. Instead, it has created a market by preying upon the

unquestioning acceptance of the consumers' indoctrinated beliefs.

The first step to revolutionizing the Christian music industry calls for consumers to wean themselves from the products designed to commercialize the Gospel. And when enough consumers take this stance and sales drop, those at the helm of the industry will finally take notice. It's through this revolutionary action that the Christian community can become advocates in "direct action" as a method of change, an effective philosophy embraced by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., one of the most visible advocates of nonviolence and direct action as methods of social change.

## *Chapter Nine*

“What came first, the music or the misery? People worry about kids playing with guns, or watching violent videos, that some sort of culture of violence will take them over. Nobody worries about kids listening to thousands, literally thousands of songs about heartbreak, rejection, pain, misery and loss. Did I listen to pop music because I was miserable? Or was I miserable because I listened to pop music?” – Rob Gordon, *High Fidelity*

Christian artists can have resounding repercussions in our society. Business is business and everyone has to earn a living, but Christians should be motivated to make their job more than just a job, it should be a means of sharing faith. The question isn't, “How can we use business to propagate the message of the Gospel,” but rather, “How can we influence our culture through our careers?”

Music artist Kendall Payne said it best when she stated, “Why should I take a bucket of water and just dump it in the ocean? When I can take that bucket of water to the desert and bring life to the dying?” That's a profound statement. Those involved in the five-fold ministry are chosen to resource and grow the church. They edify the Christian lifestyle and faith, which is their job. Outside of these ministries, Christians can impact our culture.

I think everyone has an innate desire to make some sort of mark with his or her life. Somewhere deep down it resides in the framework of fame, success and notoriety, and it's even a more common desire in the church. All faiths teach that each individual is special in God's eyes. God sees everything, even a bird that falls from a tree to the ground. We are not only taught about this unique stature afforded to each person, but are also given a mission to share with others the love of God. This mission gives every Christian purpose in their lives, and purpose is something that is seriously lacking in the world today.

I strongly believe in the ideology of purpose. The questions relating to this are as old as the sands of time. “Why are we here?” “Why was I born?” “What's the point of our

existence?” Through the scripture Christians are shown why. We are God’s creation conceived to glorify him. We are shown that each person is born with a predestined plan for their lives in the eyes of God, and we’re told that our overall purpose is to share and show his love to others that they might partake as well.

In its current form, the music produced by Christian artists doesn’t work toward this purpose and Christian music as an industry fuels, rather than offsets, the satirical treatment of religion. Televangelists asking for money wearing \$5,000 suits, Operation Rescue supporters blowing up abortion clinics, and the guy at the football game with the rainbow Afro holding up the John 3:16 sign are just a few examples of how the world views religion as a joke. Given the industry’s condition, it’s time for Christian artists to re-assess their priorities.

Let me encourage Christian artists to follow the trail blazed by others and move into the mainstream, where faith shared through music will have a far-reaching impact. Each artist that makes the transition sets an example for others to follow. Wouldn’t it be gratifying to turn on the local rock station and hear one Christian artist after another? Imagine the impact the Gospel could have working through an established entertainment medium.

I’ve had countless conversations with contemporary Christian artists about mainstream music, and read as many articles on the subject. A published letter written by Dan Haseltine of Jars of Clay defined his views about Christian artists. In it he says, “If you have to disown the community of Christ in order to do evangelism, if you have to be completely ‘non-Christian’ to be a viable conduit of the Gospel... Christ was truly a fool. I do not believe this is the true nature of evangelism.... If Christian artists do seem to lack credibility, it's most likely due to people neglecting to champion us. Perhaps we should spend less time perpetuating long-standing stereotypes toward Christian artists and more time opening the ears of those around us to some increasingly credible and excellent music. If we have created music that is substandard, I beg you, make the proper criticism. But if we are making art that, given the right set of circumstances, is worthy of mainstream radio play and MTV attention, then leave the unfounded biases to the bigot and the anarchist.”

Haseltine makes a valid point. However, I believe a less radical approach would

be more effective. An artist can be an overt Christian and still be signed to a mainstream record label. Just take a moment and think about it. In mainstream music, artists sing about a variety of things including their faith. Sting writes lyrics about transcendental meditation. The Beastie Boys do the same on Buddhism. From Islam to Satanism, artists sing about anything and everything. But the Christian community is missing a vital point: The general public doesn't care what an artist sings about as long as the music is good. Transcendental meditation isn't a widely popular subject, but it didn't stop Sting from selling albums, did it? In fact, the Beastie Boys are so popular that they hold a "Tibetan Freedom Festival" every year. Marilyn Manson and Danzig have a loyal following of kids who listen to their overtly anti-Christian messages.

P.O.D. proved to the whole Christian music industry that incredible art can be created with faith inspired lyrics, without being signed by a Christian label. P.O.D.'s hit song "Alive" was once the most requested song on MTV's "Total Request Live" and is still played on rock stations today.

I recall a Howard Stern interview with P.O.D. in which Stern said he was a big fan of the group. Stern is raw as can be and will ask very personal questions of any guest on his show. The guys from P.O.D. were phenomenal! They talked about their faith and taking their wives on the road with them. Stern couldn't believe it; he was greatly impressed with their stance on morality. P.O.D. was also a part of the OzzFest Tour, and in 2002 headlined with Ozzy Osbourne. If that doesn't exemplify following the path of Jesus, nothing does. Jesus was criticized for having dinner with tax collectors and sinners by the church, as evidence by the only scripture I feel necessary to reference in this book:

"And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him. And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners? When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." – Mark 2:15-17

P.O.D. has done more for promoting the Gospel, morality, and the Christian lifestyle than anyone else in the music industry has ever done; and it's shown many

Christian artists that it can be done. Christians can be successful music artists in the mainstream and hold their faith high as a banner to anyone who will listen. More and more artists are beginning to skip the Christian music industry altogether and to that I say, “Good for them.”

Christian artists must realize they aren’t restricted to signing with a Christian record label. Working diligently at the craft will eventually enable an artist to sign with a mainstream label. In fact, if an artist is truly innovative, mainstream labels will be banging on the door! One of the groups I’m acquainted with are an example. They are currently working in the Christian music industry and their latest album is an incredible piece of work. Mainstream labels started calling them a month before this group’s new album hit the stores.

Christian music lovers are often critical of the band Creed, but I say “Kudos” to the group! Their lead singer, Scott Stapp, is the son of a minister and grew up in the church. Granted, Stapp said that he’s “still searching” in his faith, but has adhered to his beliefs on morality and wants to have a positive influence on society. Stapp was a featured guest on Fox News Channel’s “O’Reilly Factor.” The discussion focused on how music is influencing today’s youth. Stapp stated, “Well, I came here basically to give you a little bit more hope, because I think these kids are making better decisions than you think. And I also think that these artists don’t think it through enough like you did and specifically set out to target these groups of kids. I think they’re just looking for a gimmick to sell some records.” Stapp also said, “I just want to say that I believe that we have — we should have a lot more hopeful view on what the choices that our youth of today are making, especially post-September 11th.” Many people listen to Creed’s music and it’s having a positive effect on the music industry as a whole.

Over the years I’ve told many artists, “If you want to be in mainstream music then why are you signed to a Christian music label? Get a mainstream deal even if it’s with a small label.” And I’ll add to that: If an artist wants to bring purpose to their career, signing with a mainstream label and striving for excellence empowers every artist to use their God-given talent to cultivate new interest in faith.

Herein lies the second step in this revolutionary process. On the heels of the consumers’ first assault, Christian artists lead the “second wave” by moving from their

feudal state into mainstream music.

## *Chapter Ten*

“Outside of a dog, a book is a man's best friend. Inside of a dog, it's too dark to read.” - Groucho Marx

Cal Thomas was once asked what he thought of mainstream companies owning Christian music labels. He stated, “The Christian music industry is more of an industry than it is Christian. I recall one major label head saying about an artist who had committed adultery and whose albums they were still producing... ‘We've got to make money or we don't have a ministry.’”

I struggle with these issues constantly. But, like many others, I can envision the impact faith inspired music could have on popular culture through this entertainment medium. The Christian faith can bring purpose and enrichment to a person's life. The Christian message is so simple, yet the church, as a whole community, has often been divided due to various personal perspectives causing bigotry towards those with differing opinions.

The concept of a Christian music industry wasn't a bad idea. But after 25 years it's apparent that, in it's current form, it simply doesn't work as well as it should. It dilutes the Gospel into palatable, second-rate, musical bias that clings to the very market that doesn't need to hear it. It's purely entertainment garnished with a cloak of ministry to pass as legitimate. It reeks from the very foundation of its power with the stench of hypocrisy. Its hindrances outweigh its benefits. And if the whole purpose of Christian music is, as advertised, to simply edify the body of Christ, then it's not necessary.

If the point isn't clear by now, then I'll say it plainly: Christian music should not exist as an “industry.” That foundation opposes everything we're taught in the Bible regardless of denomination, that doctrine is simply to share the message of the Gospel, often at the messenger's expense. I'm an advocate of Christian business; what I'm against is reducing the Gospel to a money making scheme.

While those intimidated by the truth may pronounce this work hypocritical, reasonable minds will agree that only an insider with tenure can accurately identify the

problems in his or her own industry. The point of this book is to encourage those involved in the Christian music industry, radio industry, and its fans to see things in the light of the truth, and revolutionize their perspective and vision of how Christians can influence society.

Twenty years ago, the industry wasn't in this condition. And now, when the church body is in need of someone to blatantly state the harsh truth, no one has the intestinal fortitude to be the "messenger of bad news."

Therefore, conscience compels me to issue a call for *REVOLUTION!* Believers in the Christian faith can impact our culture today! We can make a difference in the lives of everyone we meet. We can see the Gospel propagated in ways that history has yet to witness. And I believe the only way we'll see change in the Christian music industry is through a dynamic revolution!

### *About The Author*

*Born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Scott Hawk has spent more than a decade working in mainstream broadcasting and the Christian music industry. Respected as one of the most influential programmers in the country, he has been featured in a variety of broadcasting publications including Radio & Records magazine. Hawk is considered to be one of the industry's most prominent forward thinkers and is the founder of a successful streaming media company. He and his wife reside in Nashville, Tennessee.*

If you enjoyed *Revolution*, be sure to check out the premiere online modern rock music station: WebRock.net ([www.webrock.net](http://www.webrock.net)), modern rock for the masses.

For more information visit the web site of Scott Hawk Media at [www.scotthawk.com](http://www.scotthawk.com).