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**The Scarlet “C”
Media Portrayal of the Christian Music Industry**

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Thesis Submitted to the
Perley Isaac Reed School of Journalism
at West Virginia University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

The Scarlet "C" Media Portrayal of the Christian Music Industry

This project examines how media framing, characterizing, and agenda setting have all played leading roles in the way Christian music, as well as Christian musicians, have been portrayed by the media. Major newspaper articles with the purpose of either previewing, or reviewing the tour of two successful Christian rock bands were analyzed. Articles of two successful secular rock bands were also analyzed in order to compare how the media characterized the band's music. The results found an overwhelming negative, and often limited view on Christianity. As a result, there has continued to be a negative stigma attached to all things Christian.

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INTRODUCTION

The contemporary Christian music industry is a progressive assemblage of talented artists whose passion lies within creative music, unbound by tradition, comprised of only the latest ideas, equipment, technology, and expertise. From its beginnings in the 1970s, contemporary Christian music, or CCM as it is commonly called, has evolved with the times. It has generally advanced in the shadows of secular music; however, occasionally the CCM industry has produced the cutting edge of popular music. Its growth in fame is largely due to a generation that is in search of an alternative to the mainstream music that frequently embraces violence and sex. Unfortunately, CCM has not materialized without hardship and perceived bias from a largely secular marketplace and media.

CCM has proved to have a substantial influence within the modern day world. The media have had the difficult job as gatekeepers, deciding what press and shelf space CCM would receive. Also, the media have demonstrated the ability to set an agenda as well as the ability to label an organization, neither of which has been particularly helpful to an industry with its roots in a conservative background. In addition, the media have played a leading role in the framing of 'Christian music.' By negatively stereotyping Christian musicians, as well as their music, the media have contributed to a preconceived bias towards all things considered Christian.

Although new media may help in increasing exposure to prospective CCM artists, the few who have already been established have to deal with predetermined stereotypes, as well as false perceptions concerning the nature of Christian music. These typecasts are rooted deep in the framework of how Christian artists and

subsequently, their music, are reported on by the media. There are musicians who have “made it,” selling millions of records whose faith and foundation lies in the Christian faith. Although these artists, on the surface, may look like they have broken free from the box in which Christian musicians have collectively been placed, it is sadly evident that the scarlet “C” rarely fades.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How has contemporary Christian music been covered and/or represented in the media?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although contemporary Christian music is relatively new, the music that it stems from is considerably old. Gospel music can trace its roots as far back as the 18th Century with what were known as “spirituals” in the black culture.¹ According to John J. Thompson, spirituals were “all the different voices of Africa, combined with Jesus’ message of hope, endurance, and the meek inheriting the Earth.”² Since that time gospel has become one of the most influential styles of music contributing to the

¹Timothy Dodge, “From spirituals to gospel rap: Gospel music periodicals,” *Serials Review* 20, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 67.

² John J. Thompson, *Raised by Wolves: the Story of Christian Rock and Roll*, Toronto, Ontario: ECW Press, 2000. 20.

development of blues, jazz, country, soul, rap, and rock.³ In recent years, gospel has been adapted to form what is known as contemporary Christian music.⁴

Gospel has contributed to the culture of African-Americans, as well as the southern white culture. Although the music has served both cultures, there are distinct differences between the black and white developments of gospel.

White gospel music was largely influenced by religious revivals in the 19th Century. Dwight L. Moody and Ira D. Sankey were successful in their use of the music during their tent revivals in the South.⁵ Their belief was that popular music was a successful tool in bringing the message of salvation to their congregation, primarily the youth, and in addition, promoting “traditional” beliefs.⁶ Moving into the 20th Century, gospel became more informal and was adapted into what is known as country music, becoming a popular style of music in the South around 1930.

After slavery the music became a way of expressing the social injustices that were facing many African Americans. Black gospel became increasingly popular in the early 1930s as well, helped out by a blues pianist, Thomas A. Dorsey. Dorsey, or as he was better known, “Georgia Tom,” adapted the music into what is known today as modern gospel music.⁷

³ Dodge, 67.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.,68.

⁶ Forbes, David, and Jeffrey H. Mahan, ed. *Religion and Popular Culture in America* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2000), 113.

⁷ Dodge, 68.

Gospel music became a way of expressing the social injustices that were facing many African Americans. It also became a way of pure entertainment and fun.⁸ Gospel also had a significant impact on the popular music of the 1960s and 1970s. Even artists such as Elvis Presley can trace their roots to this form of music. The music has continued its impact into the modern-day world by influencing Christian rock and metal bands such as Stryper.⁹

Before Christian rock there was contemporary Christian music. The idea of contemporary Christian music began in the 1970s with the Jesus Movement, which began in the 1970s with the hippie generation. It was covered largely by the media because of the perceived contradiction between hippies and Jesus. The movement focused mainly on having a personal experience with Jesus rather than just looking at the outside attributes of Christianity.¹⁰ The purpose was an alternative to the “secular” music and entertainment that was available for the youth. It began solely as an industry that was confined to Christian magazines and bookstores.¹¹ The musicians found it extremely hard to cross over to the mainstream markets. The lack of marketing and radio exposure contributed to the hardships facing these musicians.¹²

Consequently, as the industry grew, a backlash in the more conservative, fundamentalist churches began. The music became a source of entertainment as well as a form of ministry. Many critics in the church found this to be too “worldly,”

⁸ Thompson, 20.

⁹ Dodge, 68.

¹⁰ Thompson, 28.

¹¹ Forbes and Mahan, 105.

¹² Ibid., 116.

perhaps even lacking genuine spirituality. Another problem that faced the industry was the lack of acceptance in the mainstream market. Music with lyrical content that was spiritual in nature was not accepted by the secular industry.¹³ According to William D. Romanowski, “popularity required religiously shallow lyrics.”¹⁴

Despite these hardships, the 1970s and early 1980s did see a growth in the music. As a result, major record labels began buying up the smaller gospel labels in hopes of breaking into a new market that was growing rapidly.¹⁵ Contemporary Christian music is at present considered to be the fastest growing music industry.¹⁶ With the purchase of Christian labels by mainstream investors, the industry records revenues close to \$500 million a year and they are expected to keep growing.¹⁷ According to SoundScan, CCM and gospel sales rose 18 percent in the first half of 2002 while the rest of the music industry is reporting a nine-percent decline.¹⁸

Gospel, along with contemporary Christian music, eventually turned toward rock as a way of expression to reach a newer generation. Christian rock has exploded in the past few decades, out-selling gospel as a multi-million dollar industry. However, the struggle for a Christian artist to achieve mainstream success is a never-ending quandary. According to Thompson, in order to achieve success in the mainstream music industry a Christian band must refrain from labeling themselves

¹³ Ibid., 112-113.

¹⁴ Ibid., 116-117.

¹⁵ Ibid., 116.

¹⁶ Joe Gow, “Saving souls and selling CDs,” *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 25, no. 4 (Winter 1998): 183.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸“Contemporary Christian and Gospel Music Sales Showing Double-Digit Growth in Spite of Overall Music Industry Decline,” *PR Newswire Association, Inc.*, 11 July 2002.

“Christian.”¹⁹ A few examples of bands that have taken this road are U2, Collective Soul, Payable on Death (P.O.D.), Sixpence None the Richer, and Creed. In interviews and in their lyrics, all of these bands profess to be “believers” but none would label themselves a “Christian band” for fear of being placed in the Christian “ghetto.”²⁰

The fear that many Christian artists have of being labeled, or looked down upon, comes from the fact that media do have labeling capabilities.²¹ The media can be used as an instrument in helping to develop the thoughts of how the public perceives the world around it. For instance, the media have been known to label groups to be conservative or liberal, but more often than not, the media will put the greatest emphasis on the conservative, or right-wing label.²²

Four studies, integrating word-use analysis and the Nexis computer system, were performed by the Media Research Center in Virginia and dealt with the media ability to label an organization and the effects it has had on those organizations. The studies included *The Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *US News and World Report*. The results were overwhelming in the fact that conservative groups were labeled “conservative,” or “right-wing,” over half of the time, whereas liberal groups were either not labeled or simply labeled “liberal” less than 5 percent of the time. Also, smaller liberal groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) were mentioned in news stories up to seven

¹⁹ Thompson, 206-214.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Brent III Bozell, and Brent H. Baker, ed., *And That's the Way it Is(n't): A reference guide to media bias* (Alexandria, Virginia: Media Research Center, 1990), 101-104.

²² Ibid.

more times than the much larger conservative group, Concerned Women for America (CWA).²³ This fact supports a view that the media are less likely to report on conservative issues and organizations.

When dealing in the mainstream music business, Thompson believes that revealing a Judeo-Christian view to the world through music, whether it be in gospel, rock, or contemporary, is a prime method of ending a popular music career. “Singing about Him [God] was one thing; however, if it became known that an artist really believed in Him, dismissal by the rock and roll mainstream soon followed.”²⁴

L. Brent Bozell III and Brent H. Baker believe that, in the search for objective reporting, the news media are considerably imbalanced.²⁵ According to the Media Research Center it only makes sense that if a conservative group is labeled “conservative,” then a liberal group should in all fairness be labeled “liberal.” “Until they [label in this manner], reporters will continue to distort the public’s perception of sources quoted in ‘news’ stories.”²⁶

The idea that the media can label an organization naturally leads to the motives behind such labeling. The media have exhibited continual bias toward religion throughout the century.²⁷ Media bias concerning CCM began mainly after World War

²³ Bozell and Baker, 101.

²⁴ Thompson, 27.

²⁵ Bozell and Baker, 104.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Mark Silk, *Unsecular Media: Making News of Religion in America*. Edited by Conrad Cherry, *Public Expressions of Religion in America* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 34.

I when the movement to a secular nation arose.²⁸ The press of the day began to decrease the amount of coverage it gave to religious news stories. A study performed by Hornell Hart between 1905 and 1930 found that in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, the amount of space given to religious subjects dropped around fifty percent. A regeneration of religious content grew around World War II, but on the whole, the idea of secularism still rose through the 1970s. A study of the *New York Times* from 1865 through 1975 found that the major drop-off of religious content arrived at the turn of the century and steadily declined after that. The lowest time for religious content was 1975.²⁹

Earlier studies dealing with the secularization of the media have come to the conclusion that the amount of space given to religion is a representation of society as a whole. Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman decided to challenge this idea in 1981 by interviewing 240 of the top journalists and broadcasters of the time. All of the major television networks and top magazines were included in the study. They found that about eighty-six percent of the journalists and broadcasters had little to no affiliation with a church or religious group. This study gave some merit to the idea of a “liberal media.”³⁰

Another study performed by the Media Research Center went further to show the actuality of a liberal media. The center surveyed a random group of journalists and asked questions such as “how they voted in recent elections, whether they consider themselves liberal or conservative, and which experts (liberal or conservative) they

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 36-37.

turn to for reliable information.”³¹ The results they achieved indicate that journalists are indeed liberal, more so than the general public. They are more likely to turn to liberal experts and vote liberal.³² This is important in showing how the media may have helped the move of society toward a more secular viewpoint.

One of the main areas the media exhibit influence is a theory known as agenda setting. More precisely, the media, being the main source of information to which the public has access, can easily shape the way the public perceives the information it receives. Agenda setting is not a new innovation on any account. It has proved to be one of the cornerstones of media theory dating back at least 25 years.³³ Agenda setting has been examined, investigated, and scrutinized many times over. It is also a theory that is ever expanding and constantly being reshaped. Considering the evolution of this idea and the means that it has been tested is a worthy study indeed. The media are powerful in that they can persuade their listeners and influence their audience’s way of thinking.

The term ‘agenda-setting’ is a way to describe what readers think based on what they are told is most important by the media and the effect that it has on them. One of the most used statements regarding this method is that “the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly

³¹ Bozell and Baker, 4.

³² Ibid.

³³ Marilyn Roberts and Philemon Bantimaroudis, “Gatekeepers in international news,” *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 2, no. 2 (spring 1997): 62.

successful in telling its readers what to think about.”³⁴ The process of agenda setting is best divided into four phases.

The beginning phase commenced with the first-ever study on agenda setting. M.E. McCombs and D.L. Shaw performed this study, published in 1972. The study interviewed 100 residents of Chapel Hill, N.C., who were likely to vote during the 1968 presidential election. The experimenters focused mainly on undecided voters and asked what they were most concerned about. After determining the five major concerns of the public, McCombs and Shaw went to the local media, evaluated what stories had been given the most importance, and compared these issues with the residents’ main concerns. They found an extremely high correlation between the news stories and the readers’ major concerns, therefore implementing the theory of agenda setting through the media.³⁵

After the Chapel Hill study was accomplished, two others followed. These studies consist of the Charlotte study (1977), and the Three Site study (1981). In “The Agenda-setting Power of Political Advertising,” Marilyn Roberts states “not only did the Charlotte study replicate the findings of macro-level agenda-setting effects of the media found in the Chapel Hill study, but at the micro-level ... refined the agenda-setting process.”³⁶ The study was important because it showed how frequency to

³⁴ B. Cohen, “The Press and Foreign Policy,” *Princeton University Press*, Princeton, NJ, (1964): 120.

³⁵ M. McCombs and D. Shaw, “The agenda-setting function of the mass media,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36 (1972): 176-187.

³⁶ Marilyn Roberts, *The Agenda-setting Power of Political Advertising*, Ph.D. diss., University of Texas (1991): 14.

media exposure had a direct influence on how the voters perceived the importance of an issue.³⁷

The Three Site study, which was conducted in three mid-western cities, modeled the Chapel Hill study. It concluded that the affect of the agenda-setting campaign depended largely on what type of media are used, the time period, and the voter's previous knowledge of the campaign along with their characteristics.³⁸

One way to study agenda setting has been the collection of two types of information -- the agenda brought about by the media and the agenda brought about by the public. Professional readers are individuals who read through information, collect data from news sources at a certain given time and record the main stories in the media. This is one manner in which the media agenda is measured. The public agenda is measured by the use of surveys. The similarities in agenda from the public and media are compared and studied in order to explain the fundamental concepts of "the issue," "the readers," and "the media's agenda" in agenda setting research.³⁹

Another form of study is to measure the degree of importance that an issue has based on the amount of exposure the audience has to that issue. This is quite a complex task because the frequency of media exposure on the viewer or reader is difficult, if not impossible, to measure. Some studies will simply count minutes of a television story or count the amount of newspaper stories on a given issue. There are still some studies that go more in depth. These studies may measure the headline size

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 15.

³⁹ Yeong Haur Kok; Angela Goh; Dunkan Holaday, "Agenda: A tool for agenda setting research," *Information Services & Use* 19, no. 4 (1999): 266.

or the amount of visual aids that a television station might use. Overall, the importance of an issue is based on the length, time, or where the story appears in the newscast or newspaper.⁴⁰

Experiments in agenda setting have been done a number of ways. One experiment performed by Shanto Iyengar and his associates involved a group that was placed in a laboratory and instructed to watch news on television concerning candidates and the issues for which they stand. The researchers then modified the videotapes to make one issue seem more important than the rest. Next, they brought in another group and allowed them to view the modified tapes. The two groups were then asked what the members thought to be the most important issue. The experiment was successful based on the fact that in the end, the group viewing the modified videotapes collectively felt the most important issue was the one that the researchers secretly presented with more salience. The other group, viewing the original videotapes, did not collectively support any certain item as the most important issue. The two groups' differing opinions show that the agenda set by the media did indeed affect their perceptions of the candidate.⁴¹

The second phase began to look at candidates' attributes and how this affected media agendas. This idea began recently with the notion that media could affect the agenda-setting process by focusing on candidates' attributes or image.⁴² According to S. Ghanem, important attributes are "subtopics, framing mechanisms, affective

⁴⁰ James H. Watt, "Agenda-setting effects of television news coverage and the effects decay curve," *Communication Research* 20, no. 3 (June 1993): 415.

⁴¹ Spito Kioussis; Philemon Bantimaroudis; Hyun Ban, "Candidate Image Attributes," *Communication Research* 26, no. 4 (August 1999): 418-420.

⁴² Roberts and Bantimaroudis, 63.

elements, and cognitive elements.”⁴³ Basically, attributes are the parts of news that are aimed at causing an emotional reaction within the audience. For example, the tone of a story can cause a reader or viewer to have a positive or negative view on the subject. Future research is concentrating more on candidates’ attributes rather than particular issues. Researchers are determining the most substantial attributes and how they can be used to set the tone, positive or negative, of a story or issue.⁴⁴

An experiment performed by Spiro Kiouisis, Philemon Bantimaroudis, and Hyab Ban was concerned with the affect of agenda attributes and found a definite correlation between agenda attributes and the character of an individual. The study was conducted at the University of Texas and involved 44 undergraduate journalism students. Four separate news articles were made concerning a fictional candidate for Congress. Two separate attributes were focused on -- qualification and personality traits, or more precisely, education and morality. Each of the articles contain a candidate with a high education and low morality; a candidate with high education and high morality; a candidate with low education and high morality; or finally, a candidate with low education and low morality. Each student was only given one article to read and then asked to complete a questionnaire. The students did not find a candidate to be more or less qualified based on education. However, results based on morality and corruptions were significant. The students believed the news article if it stated that a candidate

⁴³ S. Ghanem, “Filling in the tapetry,” In M.E. McCombs, D.L. Shaw and D. Weaver, *Communication and Democracy*, London: Lawerance Erlbaum (1997): 5.

⁴⁴ Kiouisis, Bantimaroudis, and Ban, 417.

was either moral or corrupt. These findings indicate that readers believe that corruption is an extremely important attribute, more so than education.⁴⁵

Agenda attribute ideas and agenda framing share several similar characteristics and are becoming linked in various forms. According to Tankard, Hendrickson, Siberman, Bliss, and Ghanem, framing is “the central organizing idea for news content that supplies context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration.”⁴⁶ Frames work with agenda by causing attention to be drawn toward one issue or attribute while another may go by unnoticed.⁴⁷ Because of this, McCombs and Shaw believe that “media may not only tell us what to think about, but also how to think about it, and consequently, what to think.”⁴⁸

Often the media will use frames that are socially familiar to the public. Since “frames” may be viewed as profiles that represent society’s views, and as methods of interpreting them, the media often rely on what is familiar rather than what is new and changing.⁴⁹ News bias has a substantial affect on media framing. One such example of bias is with the act of newsgathering. A significant percent of the news that is reported comes from a small information pool. One study examined 2,850 news stories in the Washington Post and the New York Times. The study found that “78%

⁴⁵ Ibid., 419.

⁴⁶ J. Tankard, L. Hendrickson, J. Siberman, K. Bliss, and S. Ghanem, “Media frames: Approaces to conceptualization and measurement.” Paper presented to the Association for Education and Journalism and Mass Communication, Boston (August 1991): 3.

⁴⁷ Kiouisis, Bantimaroudis and Ban, 417.

⁴⁸ M. McCombs and D.L. Shaw, “The evolution of agenda setting research: Twenty-five years in the marketplace of ideas,” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 4 (1993): 65.

⁴⁹ Tim Baylor, “Meida framing of movement protest: The case of American Indian protest,” *Social Science Journal* 33, no. 3 (1996): 241.

[of news] came from routine channels including official proceedings, government or agency press releases, and public officials.”⁵⁰ As a result, it becomes extremely difficult for smaller social organizations to transmit their own frames into the growing media, which is becoming increasingly more dependent on satellite communication, and the convenience associated with not having to have individual reporters at every scene.⁵¹

A study performed by Tim Baylor looked into the framing of American Indian protests and the framing issues that occurred within the media. Baylor viewed the National Broadcast Company (NBC) evening news segments over an eleven-year period beginning in 1968. He discovered five frames that repeated throughout the broadcast. He labeled these frames: Militant, Stereotype, Treaty Rights, Civil Rights, and Factionalism. Through his study he found that 98% of the news segments he analyzed used either the stereotype or militant frames.⁵²

The media typically produces the stereotype frame. In the case of the portrayal of the American Indian, the news media used artifacts that have stereotypically been associated with the Indian, as well as pictures of “singing, dancing, peace pipe, tepees, Indians on horseback, feathers, war paint, etc.”⁵³ This frame typifies the unwavering attitude that the media can, and have, possessed when approached with stereotypical social ideas. To understand the link between media framing and attributes more

⁵⁰ Ibid., 242.

⁵¹ Ibid., 243.

⁵² Ibid., 244.

⁵³ Ibid.

research is necessary, but it is fitting to say that the two are becoming increasingly joined.

The third phase of the agenda setting process proceeds to identify how people react when involved with groups of similar interests.⁵⁴ This idea is generally known as agenda melding. The idea that individuals having similar agendas tend to form groups is the root of the theory. It is important, once removed from the family setting, that individuals feel the need to make a connection with others having similar interests. The media is instrumental in this aspect by influencing the formation of such groups,

The last phase as well as influencing the individual to move toward or away from them⁵⁵ of the agenda-setting process examines how researchers investigate “who sets the agenda, ... how the press sets its own agenda among the various national publications and networks, ... and the characteristics of journalistic writing.”⁵⁶ Agenda setting is not by any means limited to these four phases -- the idea is forever expanding. Research is currently concerned with how the powerful media affect the inferior media. One of the best examples of this is the effect that the New York Times has on other publications, spiraling all the way down to regional dailies.⁵⁷

The mainstream media have the strength to set an agenda. For the most part, the agenda is market-driven when it comes to the Christian music industry. The industry,

⁵⁴ Robers and Bantimaroudis, 63.

⁵⁵ D. L. Shaw, et, “Individuals, groups, and agenda Melding: a theory of social dissonance,” *Communication Abstracts* 23, no. 1 (February 2000): 3.

⁵⁶ Roberts, 22.

⁵⁷ Robers and Bantimaroudis, 64.

along with the media, is often more affected by what records are being sold at Sam Goody or Tower records.⁵⁸

An increasingly popular Christian independent label, Tooth & Nail Records, has worked to bridge the gap between the two industries. The label has worked to span the divide between the secular and Christian market with bands such as MxPx and Velour 100. However, the label has had a rough time getting past the preconceived notion of what Christian music is. When Punk Planet, a mainstream independent magazine, produced an article concerning the high prices of Tooth & Nail records, the beginning of the article was devoted to the label's Christian affiliation. As a result, when dealing with the mainstream press Tooth & Nail makes the statement that the label is not considered a "Christian label," rather, it tries to present itself as "Christians working in the mainstream industry."⁵⁹

Christian media have tried to fill a void that has been left by mainstream press with minimal success. A cable network called Z Music was established in March 1993. The focus of the station is largely to promote Christian artists by playing mostly music videos in an MTV style and format.⁶⁰ Z Music has been fairly successful at targeting Christian and secular viewers. The network has accomplished this by repositioning themselves in order to have a broader appeal. The goal was to make the cable-casting industry re-examine the station and displace previous assumptions about Christian music. This has been accomplished partly by downplaying the "Christian"

⁵⁸ Keith Negus, "Cultural production and the corporation: Musical genres and strategic management of creativity in the US recording industry," *Media, Culture & Society* 20, no. 3 (July 1998): 367.

⁵⁹ Jonathan Dueck, "Crossing the Street: Velour 100 and Christian Rock," *Popular Music & Society* 24, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 138.

⁶⁰ Gow, 183.

label associated with the station. The network has gone from calling themselves “the world’s only 24-hour contemporary Christian music television network,” in an advertisement in *Broadcasting & Cable* magazine in 1995, to simply a music station with a “positive vibe” in 1996.⁶¹ The network has also served as a form of entertainment for its Christian and secular viewers alike. For Christians, it gives the entertainment value associated with networks such as MTV and VH1 without the sex and violence that is often linked with these stations.⁶²

Once in the mainstream another idea comes to the forefront. How are Christian music and other minorities perceived in the industry? Industry-culture is a term that represents the idea that a culture can affect an industry and inversely, that an industry can affect a culture.⁶³ Music companies often divide their staff, artists and genres according to social or cultural labels. A few examples of these labels used to identify a culture are Latino, black, domestic, and international.⁶⁴ Consequently, social life can be defined according to the music industry and not always given equal attention by the media. For example, the Latino industry represents a large market in the United States, but it is not given equal representation or marketing.⁶⁵ This discrepancy is mainly due to the fact that sales of Latin music are not often recorded. According to staff at Sony Discos and Polygram Latino, only about 20 percent of salsa music albums have been recorded by the Soundscan system because smaller stores and retailers who

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Negus, 359-360.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 376.

carry a great deal of this music do not have the Soundscan capabilities. These figures are the basis for the Billboard popularity charts.⁶⁶

Economically speaking, the industry tries to understand the music world by collecting data from sales and circulation. This method is not always accurate given the fact that small record stores and businesses are often not included in the data. The music industry will often set aside this information in order to create a world based upon the bigger commercial industries. It is reasonable to suggest, according to Keith Negus, that the recording industry does not react to what the public might want to hear or what is “out there;” rather, it is an interweaving of culture and economics that produce the music of the industry.⁶⁷

Aside from economics, another aspect of culture and society is concerned with how religion has changed as a result of technology. For example, it was once unheard-of to have television cameras in a coronation service in England. Now it is considered normal to have church services video taped and recorded. The introduction of this medium did in fact change the culture as well as religion as a whole.⁶⁸

In a world where media are considered to play “a central role in mediation of social relationships,” it is impossible not to have an affect on religion and other

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Stewart M Hoover and Knut Lundby, ed., *Rethinking Media, Religion, and Culture* (London: Sage Publications, 1997) 302.

cultural issues.⁶⁹ Once the church relied mainly on print media; now with the electronic age, there is a new medium to explore.⁷⁰

An innovative form of media has worked to bridge the gap between the church and the secular world. The Internet has become a voice to those artists who otherwise would not have had a chance to be heard, as well as a source of in-depth reports on such artists. For instance, the largest rock magazine in Christian music, *True Tunes News*, has a circulation of 50,000 worldwide and has recently moved the magazine solely to the Internet. This conversion was mainly for financial reasons: several labels went bankrupt leaving considerable debts to the magazine and new alternative magazines such as *7ball* began to grow.⁷¹

The Internet has been “the most significant boost” to the Christian rock community, according to Thompson. New websites offer fans the ability to read reviews and get news on their favorite band, as well as many of the latest bands. Bands were able to create mailing lists and receive feedback from their fans. Incidentally, the most important aspect to come out of this new medium has been the advent of Internet radio. Never before have so many people been able to actually hear Christian rock and alternative in a radio format.⁷² Although the Internet has helped the CCM industry increase contact with its listeners, it still limits the exposure of the music to new listeners.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 307.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Thompson, 235.

⁷² Ibid., 236.

HYPOTHESES

H1: Utilizing coverage of two successful bands rooted within the Christian music industry, the media focus mainly on the progressive, faith-based issues of the band's members rather than on their musical styles and performing abilities.

H2: Christianity is, for the most part, framed in a negative manner by the media.

H3: Comparing two successful secular bands to two successful Christian bands, the media will look more positively on the musical abilities of the secular bands.

H4: The media set an agenda that is generally negative in nature when reporting on Christian bands.

METHODOLOGY

Beginning in October 2001, a well-known and extremely popular rock-punk band, Payable on Death (better known as P.O.D.) began a three-month U.S. tour sparked by the release of its multi-platinum record, "Satellite." Debuting on Sept. 11, 2001, "Satellite," is the follow-up record to the highly acclaimed, multi-platinum, break-out record, "The Fundamental Elements of Southtown." P.O.D has had enormous success in both the Christian and mainstream music industries, touring with secular and Christian bands alike.

Sixpence None the Richer had three albums (*The Fatherless & The Widow, This Beautiful Mess, and Tickets For A Prayer Wheel*), which were all popular in the Christian rock community, but had not managed to cross over to a secular audience. All that changed in 1998, when the bands hit single "Kiss Me" was released into the mainstream market through the teen comedy *She's All That*. Once the movie was

released Sixpence became a household name, co-headlining major tours such as Lilith Fair, as well as touring on their own. More recently, Sixpence has been touring with bands such as the Counting Crows in order to publicize their new album “Divine Discontent,” which entered the Billboard Chart in the top 10.

The focus of this study is to examine media framing during each band’s tour. Major newspapers from a variety of cities are researched in order to acquire previews or reviews of the bands concert performance in different cities around the country. Roughly 25 articles are found for each band. The articles are then coded based on the placement, headline, amount of total references used, and most importantly, the amount, content, and categorization of references to the band’s Christian beliefs. The length of the references, or the amount of space in the article devoted to their explanations, is also examined. The two bands secular counterparts are also researched in order to give a frame of reference to how the media would typically portray a successful rock band.

A main issue of concern that has not yet been addressed involves defining Christianity. Though this step may sound trivial, it is important to notice that definitions of religious faith can easily extend beyond a linear line of explanation. Indeed, a religion normally consists of ground rules, bi-laws, or mission statements that encompass the basis for a belief system in which the members can have guidelines as to what they actually believe in; however, Christianity is often viewed very widely. Though the main belief rests within an eternal peace found through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus, most peripheral beliefs are as varied as the peoples who claim to be Christian. Certain churches may feel that instrumental music is not acceptable for

praise or for entertainment. They may also feel that a relationship between believers and pronounced atheists discounts any acceptance of Christ in the first place. It is evident that neither of these issues are a part of the belief set belonging to an increasing number of today's progressive Christian rock musicians such as the members of P.O.D. and Sixpence None the Richer.

Both bands believe their faith is something very personal to them. In an interview by Jay S. Jacobs, lead singer of Sixpence None the Richer, Leigh Nash describes the meaning behind the band's name, which originated from the book *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis. She explains that in the book "A child asks his father for a sixpence to buy his father a gift. The father gives the son the money and is happy with the gift that he gets. But he realizes that he's not any richer, because he gave the child the money in the first place. So C.S. Lewis is comparing that to his belief that God gave us the gift that we have. And that's to serve in a way that we should. We should be humble about it and know where the gift comes from."⁷³ She also goes on to say, "The one thing I know for sure today is that there is a God and that he loves me."⁷⁴

Modern Christianity is a blend of incessant desire and blazing passion for personal relationship with a supernatural Savior. It is serious in nature, defined by a believer's strength in humbleness and brokenness. In an interview conducted by Jaan Uhelszki, P.O.D. front man Sonny Sandoval, states that he "surrendered everything" he was doing and said, "God this is a hard place. You got to help me through."⁷⁵

⁷³ Jay S. Jacobs, "Sixpence None the Richer; There she goes..." *Pop Entertainment.com*; available at www.popentertainment.com/sixpence.htm; Internet accessed 28 April, 2003.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Jaan Uhelszki, "Heaven's Hous Band: An Interview With P.O.D.," *drDrew.com*, 2000; available from <http://www.drdrew.com/article.asp?id=551>; Internet; accessed 15 April 2003.

Modern Christianity is freedom from sacrificial offerings and a trademark of unconditional love. It is not bound by a set of rules, nor is it confined to a list of good deeds. When asked about the band's views on alcohol, Sonny remarked, "I'd say we have the freedom to have a beer or something, but nobody in this band ever drinks to get drunk. Even Jesus drank wine."⁷⁶ P.O.D.'s Christianity is not merely a Sunday morning event, nor is it just positive entertainment. In a *Family Christian* interview, P.O.D. drummer Wuv (Noah Bernardo Jr.) stated, "It's just like everyday living. My Christian faith doesn't revolve around the Christian youth club or what my church is doing this weekend. That's not how I live my Christian walk."⁷⁷ Modern Christianity is a lifestyle with a purpose. Wuv also states, "We love God with all our hearts and all we try to do is let people know what He's done for us and our gratitude to Him."⁷⁸

Based on this working definition of Christianity, it is now possible to determine whether references from the coding of the articles should be categorized as positive, neutral, or negative. In order for a reference to exist as a positive frame, it must refrain from characterizing the band in a manner discordant with the defined Christianity. It must contain supportive, nonjudgmental phraseology. It must try to explain a belief system rather than cascade into stereotypical molds of a media-defined Christianity. A neutral frame of reference contains direct identifiers, i.e. "Christian rock band." A negative frame of reference tends to label the band while mocking their beliefs in a typical manner. These references most commonly utilize overused Biblical

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Jen Abbas, "Family Christian Interview," *Family Christian.com*; available from http://www.thejahnetwork.com/interviews/familychristian_interview.asp; Internet; accessed 15 April 2003.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

adages, clichés, and stereotypes associated with an archaic Christianity created by the media. In a similar manner, the headlines of the articles, and the quotes included by the reporter, are analyzed in order to assess whether the band’s Christianity or musical achievements are the main focal point. The placement and length of different references are also closely noted to determine where and how positive, neutral, or negative connotations are normally used in the articles.

In addition to Christian references, the first adjective to reference the quality of music for all four bands, Christian and secular, are categorized. These also are divided into a positive, neutral, or negative frame of reference. A positive reference is highly descriptive, hard-hitting, energized and optimistic. A negative reference tends to degrade, demean, or belittle the music. A neutral reference is merely identifying the music style into a genre, i.e. “hard rock music.”

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hypothesis one - Utilizing coverage of two successful bands rooted within the Christian music industry, the media focus mainly on the progressive, faith-based issues of the band’s members rather than on their musical styles and performing abilities - is accepted in that from the very first glance, P.O.D., as well as Sixpence None the Richer, are unable to break the confines of the Christian-rock box. Nearly half of the headlines include some reference to the bands’ spirituality. Examples include this headline from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette: “P.O.D. and G.O.D.; Heavy band puts a

message of hope in the grunge;”⁷⁹ or this one from the Star-Tribune: “Otherworldly unplugged; Label makes one Squint to see Sixpence’s faith.”⁸⁰

An important note to realize involves the common trend to insert several musical characterizations into a small portion within the article and then devote the rest of the article to the band’s spiritual beliefs. The code sheet reveals that there are actually more characterizations (mostly one or two word descriptions) referencing P.O.D. and Sixpence’s musical style than there are references to the members’ Christian beliefs; however, after reading the articles, it is blatantly evident that the Christian references are given more space and attention. Moreover, reporters used quotes that in some way referenced the bands Christianity slightly more than 50 percent of the time.

The results of this study clearly identify an emphasis on the band’s faith rather than their music talents and abilities. This characteristic is demonstrated through the use of quotes taken from the band, as well as the amount of space allotted for faith-based information.

Hypothesis two - Christianity is, for the most part, framed in a negative manner by the media - is accepted in that almost 80 percent of the initial Christian references are located early in the articles; even more are contained within the first ten lines. The remaining initial references are found no further than the middle of each article, thus framing the band by their faith from the start.

⁷⁹ Ed Masely, “P.O.D. and G.O.D.; Heavy band puts a message of hope in the grunge,” *Pittsburg Post-Gazette*, 16 November 2001, sec. A&E, p.26.

⁸⁰ Susan Hogan, “Otherworldly unplugged; Label makes on Squint to see Sixpence’s faith,” *Star-Tribune (Mpls.-St. Paul)*, 27 March 1999, sec. Metro, p. 9B.

Overall, of the 162 Christian references, only 21 (13%) are positive, 50 (31%) are neutral, and 91 (56%) are negative. All of the articles with only one or two references are mainly negative.

Every article references the band's Christianity at least once. Although the majority of the articles reference it three times, some articles reference it as many as eight to twelve times. A common thread between the articles with three references and the articles with more is the ratio of positive references to negative references, which is about 1:3. Around 70 percent of the first references in the articles are negative. A few examples of these references are "P.O.D. is down with the Almighty,"⁸¹ "religious rockers,"⁸² "most rockers would have snickered at the idea of Christian boys in heavy metal,"⁸³ or "not even an act of God could've prevented Sixpence None the Richer from packing the Zu at Makati Shangri-La Hotel."⁸⁴ The only articles that contain a positive first reference are those articles that contain three or less total Christian references. Only a handful of second references are positive. The last reference is negative about 60 percent of the time and positive only twelve percent of the time. An example of a positive reference is "declaration of faith is just one dimension of [P.O.D.'s] music,"⁸⁵ or "Leigh Nash and the boys are also equally respected for their strong Christian faith."⁸⁶

⁸¹ Joan Anderman, "P.O.D. professes spirituality, not Christianity," *Boston Globe* 26 October 2001, p. D14.

⁸² Kirk Baird, "Rockers break out the 'Christian music' mold," *Las Vegas SUN* 18 October 2001.

⁸³ Thomas Conner, "P.O.D. uses heavy sonic punch as a stealth weapon for Christian message," *Tulsa World*, 4 November 2001, sec. ARTS, p.H3.

⁸⁴ Edwin P. Sallan, "Sixpence all the richer," *Buisness World* 6 August 1999.

The media continue to characterize and stereotype Christianity in the music field as it has in so many other areas of the faith. P.O.D. and Sixpence are clearly framed as ‘Christian bands’ even though the bands themselves deny this label. The overwhelmingly negative tone given to Christianity is another indication of how framing has been, and is, continually carried throughout the media.

Hypothesis three - Comparing two successful secular bands to two successful Christian bands, the media will look more positively on the musical abilities of the secular bands - is partly rejected in that the media did in fact give as much positive praise for the Christian bands’ musical style as it did for the secular bands. The amounts of positive references are 44 percent for secular, and 42 percent for Christian. An example of a positive reference is “original rock and rap collision,”⁸⁷ or “ska revivalists.”⁸⁸

However, this hypothesis is also accepted in that there was a larger range of dissimilarity with the negative references, 16 percent for the secular bands, and 31 percent for the Christian bands. An example of a negative reference is “over-exposed bit o’ fluff,”⁸⁹ or “bubble-gum alternative.”⁹⁰ This may suggest that although the

⁸⁵ Nick Marino, “Tilling new ground in faith rock; P.O.D. putting the music upfront, along with beliefs,” *Times-Union* (Jacksonville) 16 November 2001.

⁸⁶ Sallan, “Sixpence all the richer.”

⁸⁷ Lina Lecaro, “Pop Music Linkin Park’s Rap ‘n’ Rock,” *Los Angeles Times* 1 February 2001, sec. Calendar, p. F-37.

⁸⁸ Richard Harrington, “No Doubt: They’re Back-Seriously,” *Washington Post* 7 April 2000, sec. Style, p. C07.

⁸⁹ Stephen Lynch, “No Doubt, Lit back on home turf,” *The Orange County Register* 7 August 2000, sec. Show, p. F04.

⁹⁰ Angela Moore, “Sponsor bringing bands to their fans,” *St. Petersburg Times (Florida)* 29 October 1999, sec. Get Out!, p. 10.

reporter might be fond of the Christian band, and even respect their musical styling and abilities, their faith, and the negative stigma attached to it still comes barreling through. Negativity is still the key factor when dealing with the Christian bands. Perhaps if only the music were to be judged, and not the band as a whole, the overall negativity would subside.

The most noticeable difference, however, was in the amount of neutral references, 27 percent for the Christian bands, and 40 percent for the secular bands. This may indicate a willingness to simply describe the type, or genre, of the music for the secular bands, rather than trying to put a label on it as with the Christian bands.

Hypothesis four - The media set an agenda that is generally negative in nature when reporting on Christian bands - is accepted in that the agenda set by the media is revealed through Watt's notion -- in order to determine what the media has deemed important one must determine which issue is given the most salience.⁹¹ A good way to research this is by looking at the placement, or order, that has been given to each issue in an article: whether it is the band's spirituality or the success of their music career. In the case of referencing P.O.D. and Sixpence's faith, a majority of the references were found in, or near, the beginning of each article. A majority of the articles began this tone by referencing the band with some sort of spiritual axiom. The fact that the band's Christianity is the sole focus of most articles makes it evident, according to Iyengar, that the public will believe that the band's faith is also their most salient issue -- even above their music.⁹² These ideas collaboratively represent a baseline principle

⁹¹ Watt, 415.

⁹² Kiouisis, Bantimaroudis, and Ban, 418-420.

for the fact that the media have set an agenda. Bands that are labeled Christian can never break free from the mold.

It is quite troublesome that Christianity has been scrutinized and degraded by the media. Media concern themselves with one idea such as the impossible peaceful coexistence of Christians and rock bands.

From the very beginning of the articles, essentially the headlines, it is evident that the tone of many articles had already been established. Not only has the band simply been called Christian, they are often misinterpreted as a band whose sole purpose was to preach its faith. For example, one headline reads, “P.O.D. uses heavy sonic punch as a stealth weapon for Christian message.”⁹³ It is also clear that the majority of news organizations support an agenda that misidentifies bands whose members share a Christian faith simply as a Christian band. Given the fact that references with the intention of labeling P.O.D. and Sixpence None the Richer as a Christian band were recorded as neutral, it is still important to point out that the bands prefer not to be labeled as such, rather as a band of musicians who share a Christian faith. P.O.D., as well as Sixpence, requested on numerous occasions not to be associated with the Christian music that has such a negative stigma attached to it. Leigh Nash, of Sixpence None the Richer, explains it best in an interview by the *Chicago Sun-Times*, “I just think that the whole big reason why we didn’t want that label slapped on us had nothing to do with being ashamed of our faith, it had to do with some really bad bands out there. People have a certain view in their heads of

⁹³ Conner, “P.O.D. uses heavy sonic punch,” sec. ARTS, p.H3.

what a ‘Christian band’ will sound like even before they hear it. I’m not saying it’s right or wrong, but we always just wanted to be judged for our music.”⁹⁴

It is also interesting to note the order in which the references come. Overwhelmingly the first and second references tend to be negative, with the second reference, for the most part, being either negative or neutral. This could indicate that the reporters initially fall susceptible to the general bias associated with Christianity and rock music, but as the article continues, they may try to better describe the band’s music in regard to their faith.

Also, it becomes increasingly troublesome to see that even though there are references to the band’s musical talent, it is rarely ever the focus of the article. A few articles did focus on the band’s success musically, but not a single one left out the fact that the bands were “Christian.” Perhaps if the majority of the articles focus on the music, rather than the bands spiritual beliefs, the negative stigma attached to Christian music would have a chance to slowly disseminate. In addition, the amount of negative references is obviously out of proportion. It is important to note that negative references total more than the positive and neutral references combined. This fact shows a clear trend in how Christian musicians are reported on by the media. The reporter is more apt to revert to the pre-established ideas and biases that began early in CCM history.

⁹⁴ Kim Jae-Ha, “Sixpence can afford to enjoy rock fame,” *Chicago Sun Times* 15 February 1999, sec. Features, p. 32.

CONCLUSION

The band's Christian lifestyle is an integral part of who they are. Even though it is important to include the band's faith in news articles, it should not be the main focus. Reports should perhaps mention P.O.D. and Sixpence's faith as one aspect of their music, but then should focus on the other aspects that make up a successful rock band. Indeed the band's devotion is important to them, but so are their family life and the place where they grew up. For instance, three of P.O.D.'s band members are from south San Diego, and had to deal with pressures associated with an area that was heavily controlled by gangs and drugs. They now try to help others in their community that might not have been able to withstand the pressures. They still live in San Diego and are proud of their roots. In fact, the band has written many songs such as "Southtown" that describe their life in San Diego.

Sixpence None the Richer was established when all the members were still in high school. They worked their way up through the Christian music circuit, and produced three successful albums. One album, *The Fatherless & The Widow*, Billboard declared to be one of the best albums of the year. However, it was not until the producers of the comedy, *She's All That*, decided to use a song that had been released two years earlier, "Kiss Me," as its anthem, did Sixpence receive any musical respect from the mainstream market place, or from the masses. Another interesting fact is "Kiss Me" almost did not make it onto the album. The song was a last minute choice. The band even came close to breaking up at one point.

P.O.D. and Sixpence have chosen not to be marketed as a ‘Christian band’ and therefore should not be treated as one. The Beastie Boys are not labeled as a ‘Buddhist hip-hop band,’ so why should P.O.D. or Sixpence be labeled as a ‘Christian band?’ It is evident from the previous results that reporters, when interviewing the band, either focus on their spiritual beliefs or chose to mainly include the quotes that these bands have given concerning their belief system. It seems that the media have found an angle in which to report on these bands and have refused to let go. By no means is P.O.D. or Sixpence the first bands to fall victim of bias reporting, and by past trends, it is evident that they will not be the last.

The way that Christian music has been covered and portrayed in the media can be explained a number of ways. First, the roots of the music extend beyond the beginnings of modern day press. Furthermore, they grew with the establishment of the media. Next, they withered as the press began to exhibit considerably more secular views of the world around it. The Christian industry has also been unable to distance itself from the scarlet “C,” meaning there has seemed to be a stigma on all things considered Christian by the media and the general public. The artists in the industry have tried, with little success, to dissociate themselves from the “Christian” label.

Perhaps Hornell Hart was the first to recognize that the media are strangling Christian music. In an environment where printed representation is oxygen, Christian music has been suffocated in the media. It has been mostly absent in the world of liberal media studied by Lichter and Rothman. These are but a few analogies of how the media affect the bearing of Christian music on the secular market. As the media continue to set an agenda that is more or less their own, the Christian music industry

has been framed and categorized into its own bubble that only recently has begun to burst.

The study performed concerning the framing of a Christian rock band by the mainstream media was successful in that it suggests there is indeed a preconceived bias when dealing with the Christian music industry. It also showed that the media continued their role in the agenda setting process by placing the main emphasis on the band's spiritual beliefs, and in doing so, continued the agenda already set in place by their predecessors. Also, an interesting fact is that much of the information collected concerning reference tone was overwhelmingly negative. Very little was written that put the bands in a positive light; rather, P.O.D. and Sixpence None the Richer's ideals are scrutinized and image plagiarized.

To build on the strength of this study, a larger database should be compiled consisting of more bands with similar backgrounds, i.e. a foundation in Christianity. It would also be interesting to examine the different framing of the articles that contain a Christian reference in the headline to those that did not. This research would be beneficial in helping to expose a stereotype brought forth by the media, which may or may not be shared by the public.

Despite the success of a multi-platinum selling rock band, the stigma attached to the Christian faith is so strong that it continues to plague even P.O.D., as well as Sixpence None the Richer. "We're not here trying to be better than everyone... A lot of people get a misinterpretation of P.O.D. as 'Oh they think they're better than us' or this or that. They're goody two shoes.' Dude, I'm just a man trying to make it in this

world. I'm nothing special. I just have faith. I have a foundation in what I stand for, and I just want to encourage the world as opposed to bringing it down."⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Marino, "Tilling new ground."

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