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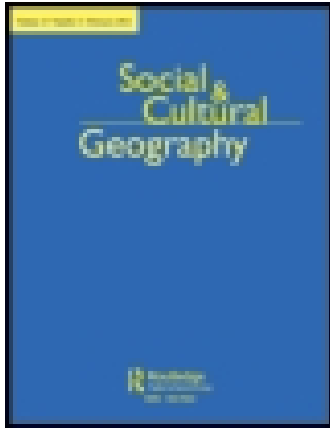
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# The pastoral role of Contemporary Christian Music: the spiritualization of everyday life in a suburban evangelical megachurch

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*Contemporary Christian Music (CCM), popular music featuring evangelical Christian lyrics, is one of the most widely consumed forms of commercial entertainment for America's 70–80 million white evangelical Christians. CCM is an excellent lens through which to examine the complex interactions of religious faith, community sentiment, and popular music practices in the contemporary US. I explain how CCM performs the 'pastoral' task of reinforcing Christian faith in an evangelical megachurch in the suburbs of Sacramento, California. I argue that a monthly concert series not only guides evangelical Christians in their 'walk', but also helps constitute the flock by building a sense of community. I suggest three spatial analytics to understand CCM's pastoral role: the place of the suburb, the sacred space of the church coffeehouse, and the body. At all three scales of analysis, the musical and religious practices of CCM at one suburban church spiritualize the everyday lives of the participants.*

**Key words:** music, Christianity, suburb, religion, community, everyday life.

## Introduction

Contemporary Christian Music (CCM), the catch-all term for popular music that features evangelical Christian lyrics (Romanowski 1990: 143), is one of the most widely consumed forms of commercial entertainment for America's 70–80 million white evangelical Christians (Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals 2008). CCM, known by its acronym CCM, expresses the evangelical tenets of a personal relationship with Jesus

Christ, a duty to spread the gospel, and Biblical inerrancy (El-Faizy 2006: 9; Sheler 2006: 32; Wills 2007: 3). CCM fans, who tend to live in disproportionately poor, rural, Republican-voting, and evangelical Christian media markets, listen to these Christian variants of hard rock, dance-pop, adult contemporary, and hip-hop at Christian music festivals, in churches, on CDs purchased in big box stores, and on CCM radio stations (Lindenbaum 2009a). Though journalists (Beaujon 2006; Radosh 2008; Sandler 2006)

and academic scholars (Balmer 2000; Bennett 2008; Hendershot 2004) have only recently explored the importance of entertainment media to evangelical Christianity, CCM is an excellent lens through which to examine the complex interactions of religious faith, community sentiment, and popular music practices in the contemporary US. Yet, almost no studies have addressed the geography of CCM outside of its use in church worship.

In this article, I explain how CCM performs the ‘pastoral’ task of reinforcing Christian faith in an evangelical megachurch in the suburbs of Sacramento, California. I argue that the First Friday monthly concert series at Sacramento Faith Ministries (SFM) not only guides evangelical Christians in their ‘walk’, but also helps constitute the flock itself by building a sense of community. I suggest three spatial analytics to understand CCM’s pastoral role: the place of the suburb, the sacred space of the church coffeehouse, and the body. At all three scales of analysis, the musical and religious practices of CCM at one suburban megachurch spiritualize the everyday lives of the participants.

### Rocking the flock at three spatial scales

Once a month for two years, I drove 90 minutes to the baked asphalt of east Sacramento’s suburbia to help put on a ‘First Friday’ concert in the coffeehouse of SFM.<sup>1</sup> On the first Friday of each month, I signed up first-time audience members for a mid-concert raffle and occasionally operated the stage lights during the concert. I ate dinner, prayed, put up posters, evaluated TV shows, and discussed music with the organizers of the event. I conducted ten one-to-two hour in-person interviews with the organizers, as well as ten interviews with performing acts over

email and MySpace. I met the organizers’ children, wives, mothers, and siblings. I played soccer with them. Though I am not an evangelical Christian, they welcomed me when I attended Sunday services and Wednesday Bible study. They recommended bands to me, and burned me CDs. These white evangelical Christians were some of the first people to whom I told about my engagement to be married.

At this Sacramento megachurch, I conducted the type of ethnographic study suggested by scholars for the study of religious (Smith 2000a: 9) and musical (Cohen 1993; Saldanha 2002; Thornton 1996) practices. Complementing more structural or institutional analyses of the music industry (Loving 1998; Negus 1999; Sanjek 1998; Scott 1999), such critical ethnography attempts to illuminate ‘processes of constitution and interconnection’ (Hart 2004: 98). In this case, ethnographic study reveals the constitution of evangelical Christian music, faith, and community.

Theorists have long argued that popular musical practices—recording, performing, selling, discussing, and listening to music—can have significant, and contradictory, social effects. Scholars have noted the potential of musical practices to shape national sentiment (Kong 2006; Lowenthal 2006), community affiliation (Haslam 1999; Kruse 1993), everyday life (Frith 2002; Hesmondhalgh 2003), and political consciousness (Lipsitz 1994; Rose 1994). After a period of relative neglect (Kong 1995), geographers have found popular music to be not only reflective but also productive of cultural politics (Leyshon, Matless and Revill 1998; Smith 1997). The ramifications of American evangelical musical practices are of particular scholarly interest, given the influential position of evangelicals in US elections and international geopolitics

(Dittmer 2008; Gerhardt 2008; Jones and Sage 2010: 318). I argue that the First Friday concerts reinforce evangelical Christian faith, giving credence to the claim that musical practices tend to reaffirm social movements or personal beliefs that already exist (Denisoff 1972: 149; Howard 1992: 125; Romanowski 2007: 19).

Many of the evangelical Christians responsible for the First Friday events acknowledge a theological mandate to spread the gospel. For some at First Friday, the urge to evangelize the unsaved is the primary priority. Some of its acts claim success; rapper Refugee reports, 'We have had many youth and even adults come up to us after a show asking about Jesus. A lot of times they will accept Christ right then and there'. Other musicians and organizers posit that they may be sparking the process of nonbelievers becoming Christian, rather than winning souls over the course of an hour.

However, First Friday musicians and organizers more often perform the less glamorous task of retaining the souls who already have been saved. This 'rocking the flock' (Creasman 2008: 41), I argue, is the primary religious function of First Friday. Although the church bills the concerts as youth 'outreach', many of the teens at the concerts are already members of the SFM junior high school, high school, and college-age youth groups. Interviews suggest that the vast majority of audience members already consider themselves to be Christians. As one organizer explains, 'The kids we're reaching are on the edge or are church kids'.

The CCM of First Friday thus could be said to perform a 'pastoral' rather than 'evangelistic' role, a mission consistent with the evangelical notion of faith as a process or 'walk' rather than a one-time event (Ferre 1990: 115). Almost everyone I interviewed at First Friday cited specific examples of how CCM had strengthened their faith. One First

Friday performer claims, 'Some of our concerts have led to conversations that brought people back to God', and another purports to help listeners live 'a more Christ-centered life'. Musical practices at one evangelical megachurch demonstrate just how CCM accomplishes this pastoral effect—that is, how it produces particularly evangelical subjectivities and how it fosters the flock's sense of community.

The reinforcement of evangelical Christian faith is significant because not all religious traditions are as adept at retaining their members. The pastoral effect provided by CCM could help to explain why surveys show that theologically conservative Protestantism does a better job of retaining its children than mainline churches (Greeley and Hout 2006: 18). Birth (rather than conversion) accounts for over two-thirds of the population increase of theologically conservative Protestants (Greeley and Hout 2006: 105), and these young Christians develop their religious identities in part outside the home (Hopkins, Olson, Pain and Vincett 2011: 326). Many CCM fans I interviewed claimed to have been 'born again' as an adolescent, indicating that evangelical Christian faith is not innate and static. Since CCM plays a role in reinforcing the Christianity of these children and young adults, it also plays a role in the growth of evangelical Christianity as a whole.

There is a strong spatial element to CCM's pastoral function. Accordingly, this study emulates scholars who lend a complex geographic perspective to religious practices (Kong 2001; Proctor 2006; Yorgason and della Dora 2009) and is among the first to address CCM geographically. Beyond merely mapping the distribution and diffusion of beliefs, geographers have begun to examine how religious practices shape everyday lives (Gokariksel 2009; Holloway and Valins

2002), constitute transnational development networks (Olson 2006), and generate geopolitical imaginations (Agnew 2006; Dittmer 2007). My research at a Sacramento megachurch emphasizes three different spatialities of evangelical religious and musical practices, demonstrating how a geographic lens is crucial to understanding CCM's pastoral role.

First, CCM's reconfiguration of a Sacramento suburb as a place of community rather than social alienation emphasizes how a local place is interrelated with white evangelicals throughout the US and the CCM industry. Second, music, prayer and pastoral messages help transform a church coffeehouse into a sacred space, elucidating how practices as well as architecture negotiate the fluid boundary between sacred and secular. Third, the bodily dimension of these monthly concerts highlights the importance of habitual religious practices, while the presence of young children and nonwhite bodies at these concerts reveals CCM's role in defining the constituency of the flock. All three of these spatial analytics highlight the importance of everyday life to the reinforcement of religious faith and community; CCM helps shepherd the evangelical flock by infusing the quotidian with Christianity. The centrality of everyday practices to evangelical faith indicates how all three spatial lenses are needed to comprehend the full extent of CCM's pastoral influence.

### **The place of the suburbs and the great beyond**

Writer and Sacramento native Joan Didion decries her hometown's loss of character after 1950, lamenting her sense of a place for which change seems to be the only constant (1979). For some long-time natives such as Didion, shifting demographics, economic sectors, land

use patterns, and cultural norms have eroded Sacramento's identity. Sacramento is the biggest city in California's rapidly growing Central Valley (Baldassare 2000). Residents of the Sacramento area endure the second-highest per-person sprawl costs in the country—expenses that include the additional costs of transportation infrastructure, water and sewer hook-ups, schools, and emergency services necessitated by low-density development (Baldassare 2006; Burchell, Downs and Mukherji 2005). Furthering a sense of impermanence, the Sacramento metro area suffered the country's ninth highest foreclosure rate in 2008, and nearby Stockton ranked first (Rampell 2009). Sacramento suburbs such as Citrus Heights, Elk Grove, and Rancho Cordova (incorporated in 1997, 2000, and 2003, respectively) do not have hundreds of years of history from which to forge a sense of place. Their office parks, strip malls, themed housing developments, and adjacency to the city of Sacramento are less than two generations old. Nor can Sacramento area residents base their sense of place on a traditional rural landscape, since the corporate agriculture of the surrounding Central Valley presents 'one of the most intensively managed and artificial landscapes in the world' (Brechin 1999: 51).

Sacramento's suburban sprawl is new, but not all of its suburbanites lack a viable sense of place. Many Sacramento residents derive a sense of community from a new form of Christianity—one that, in part, developed in California suburbs where transient residents sought stability and belonging. Evangelical megachurches produce a sense of community in suburbs that lack the equivalent secular social institutions (Connell 2005: 327; Thumma and Leppman 2011: 918). Indeed, nondenominational evangelical megachurches, or churches with over 2,000 weekly



attendees, thrive in suburban areas of the US (Chaves 2006: 339; Karnes, McIntosh, Morris and Pearson-Merkowitz 2007: 263; Warf and Winsberg 2010). These so-called 'Next' churches employ new technologies and organizational structures to provide a full retinue of spiritual and social services for their members (Trueheart 1996). Named by Catholics to mean 'Holy Sacrament' (Bright 1998: 325), the capital of California is now home to many evangelical Protestant churches (Association of Religion Data Archives 2000; Hartford Institute for Religion Research 2007). In Sacramento's expansive urban fringe, SFM claims to draw 6,000 children and adults to Sunday services, and the church has 'planted' nine spin-off churches (five in the Sacramento area).

Understanding a changing suburb in Sacramento thus necessitates a relational conception of place, such that the local is reconsidered as 'dynamic and plural' (Connell and Gibson 2004: 347; Guilbault 1993; Revill 2005). Contrary to notions of an unchanging, bounded, disconnected place steeped in nostalgia and tradition, the identity of this suburban place is reworked through interconnections with wider processes (Hart 2002; Massey 1994; Pred and Watts 1992). Already, scholars have linked the American suburb to federal housing, transportation, and tax policies (Jackson 1985), the defense industry (Hise 1997; Scott 1996), structural shifts in manufacturing (Lewis 2004; Scott 1986), crises of capital accumulation (Walker 1981), and international migration (Valle and Torres 2000; Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996). The CCM of First Friday redefines the place of one Sacramento suburb by fostering two sets of social interconnections—the suburb's relationship with the US CCM industry and the relationship of Sacramento suburbanites to the evangelical community.

Recorded CCM is produced by large media corporations headquartered in Nashville, Tennessee, and distributed to retail outlets throughout the USA. Christian musical practices at First Friday define a locality in opposition to the national CCM industry, but these concerts also help nourish that same industry. More complicated than simple co-optation or rejection, a local scene's music and meanings (Frith 1989: 4) indicate the contradictions inherent in 'an entangling of the exogenous and the indigenous' (Pred 1995: 1077), or the synthesis of seemingly local cultural practices with those that seem to originate elsewhere.

Throughout my experiences at First Friday, the term 'CCM' was noticeably absent. When asked, organizers associated CCM with the glitzy corporate industry based in Nashville. One organizer claimed CCM 'means schmaltzy, cheesy music, which has become the Christian mainstream'. Another described CCM as 'a brand name' that 'speaks of the ghettoization of Christian music'. Members of harder rock bands eschewed the term CCM because they felt it describes saccharine soft-rock Christian artists such as Stephen Curtis Chapman. Christian hip-hop artists avoided the term because CCM radio stations do not play much holy hip-hop. The Sacramento bands who accepted the 'Christian' label for their music as well as their faith tended to refer to their music by genre, for example 'Christian hardcore'. Finally, artists who prefer to think of themselves as 'Christians in a band' rather than 'a Christian band' disassociated with CCM in an effort to escape being pigeonholed as 'only' a Christian band.

Also, many of the First Friday organizers and most of the performing acts listen to secular music as well as what they consider to be CCM. One youth pastor lamented the 'ghetto' and 'separate universe' of the Nashville-based

CCM industry, favoring the music of Depeche Mode and Led Zeppelin rather than CCM staples such as Michael W. Smith and Amy Grant. Another said he prefers the general market indie-folk of Sufjan Stevens (who is Christian) and Bon Iver (who is not) to the polished Christian pop found on a Fish or K-Love CCM radio station.

Positioning the local CCM scene in opposition to the national industry, several youth pastors and musical performers voiced a critique of the industry's standardized song structures, imitation of previous hits, and cookie-cutter marketing strategies that recalls Theodor Adorno (Adorno 1998; Horkheimer and Adorno 1972; Howard and Streck 1999: 149).<sup>2</sup> One organizer told me he wants First Friday 'to show that there is local talent, and Christians can make great music without the Christian music industry'. None of the Sacramento bands I observed are signed to Nashville-based CCM record labels, and none have received significant airplay on corporate-owned CCM radio stations. First Friday events are strictly not-for-profit; the coffee-house is in the red every year, the audience does not pay to attend, and bands only receive a nominal reward for playing, enough for 'gas money or a pizza'. As pop-punk band A Moment's Notice told the First Friday audience, 'We're not here to be famous rock stars, we're here for you'.

Yet, the local scene of First Friday is not entirely disconnected from the Nashville-based CCM industry. SFM once operated a music production company and developed a music radio show broadcast on over 200 stations. The church also founded a now-defunct record company in 1982, distributing albums to the Christian market through CCM record company Word and to the general music market through A&M and Island Records. The expansive SFM building con-

tains a fully equipped recording studio where Christian acts from as far away as England record. CCM producer and performer Charlie Peacock attended SFM before moving to Nashville and producing the albums of successful cross-over Christian alternative rock band Switchfoot. San Diego-based Switchfoot has since played several concerts at SFM, inspiring the Sacramento teens in attendance to start their own Christian bands and become music majors in college. Many First Friday musicians and fans claim to enjoy the corporately operated Fish, Air-1, and KYCC radio stations, which are headquartered in the Sacramento media market, as well as for-profit national station The Fish.

Further, the fans, musicians, and organizers I interviewed generally portrayed commercial success as admirable as long as commercial motivations are not primary. After each concert's closing prayer, the youth pastor instructs the audience to 'buy some merch'. One musician opined:

I make money playing shows and I don't think there is anything wrong with that . . . . The only reason I have issue with that is when you are making Christian music strictly for profit and not at all for Christ . . . . It shouldn't be strictly about the money.

A rapper concurred, 'It doesn't bother me the same way it doesn't bother me that the Pastor gets paid. It bothers me, however, if the sole purpose of the music is for profit'. Almost every performer and organizer I consulted argued that musicians need to charge money for their art to make a living, and not one insisted that all Christian music should be provided free of charge.

Beyond fostering acceptance of the CCM industry's commercial motives, First Friday concerts contribute to the industry's success by fueling identification with particularly



‘Christian’ products. The CCM industry depends on a permeable and dynamic boundary between sacred (or Christian) and secular (or general market) music; the Nashville-based industry adopts the organizational structure and business practices of the secular music industry while branding CCM as distinct from similar-sounding non-Christian music (Lindenbaum 2009b). Yet, as many scholars have noted, the distinction between sacred and secular can be fluid and negotiated (Howe 2009; Ivakhiv 2006; Kong 2001). In part because CCM does not differ stylistically from other genres of popular music, its classification as ‘Christian’ is essential to its viability as a marketing category.

First Friday helps cement a boundary between secular and Christian music by mandating that its performing acts be exclusively Christian in faith. As one organizer explained, ‘Some churches mix both Christian and non-Christian, but we have Biblical authority for not mixing the light and the dark’. The musicians reinforce the ‘Christian’ categorization of their music onstage. One rock band began its set by announcing, ‘We are a Christian rock band from Elk Grove, California’. Other musicians gave testimonies about their faith between songs and offered to talk about Jesus to audience members after the show. A bearded indie-folk trio explained, ‘This is from our new album about the Holy Spirit’. Metalcore band The Color Amnesty proclaimed from the stage, ‘Jesus loves you through all circumstances and we do too’. By branding the music as Christian, some of the very musicians and organizers who abhor the idea of a separate Christian market contribute to that market’s success. The performance of a song at a suburban Sacramento church coffeehouse borrows stylistically and theologically from nationally renowned Christian artists, but also helps create the fan base of white

evangelical Christians who purchase recorded music from the industry.

In addition to its relationship with the national CCM industry, SFM develops a sense of place through interconnections with other white evangelical Christians. One of the ways SFM provides a sense of community to the suburbs is through the use of CCM in outreach programs. SFM has hosted CCM concerts since its inception in 1974, when the founding pastor and his wife targeted hippies with Bible study in their apartment. Several SFM church members have hosted concerts at the church for the past 12 years. Since 2003 these church employees and their friends have been organizing monthly First Friday concerts in SFM’s Solid Grounds Coffeehouse, one of several youth-oriented music venues that are housed in churches on the periphery of the Sacramento metro region.

SFM caters to young people and families with children, the primary targets for megachurches (Hadaway 2005: 4; Karnes, McIntosh, Morris and Pearson-Merkowitz 2007: 264). In addition to music, SFM offers basketball, church camp, Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday service, high school and junior high school youth group gatherings, Bible study, and drama class. Parents can attend marriage seminars, addiction recovery sessions, movie screenings, home Bible study, and men’s, women’s, and mixed Bible study at the church. For the organizers of the First Friday events and many of the teens who attend, SFM is the center of their social (and in the case of the pastors, professional) life. Most SFM attendees come to the church once per week, and many come more frequently. By offering a complete array of theological, educational, and entertainment services to its young members and other area Christians, SFM cements the centrality of church in the lives of these suburbanites.

SFM also helps foster commitment to the evangelical community by assigning responsibilities to as many people as possible. The existence of separate women's, junior high, and high school worship groups necessitates a number of 'responsible' participants four times that of a smaller one-service-per-week church. At First Friday, one jovial and hyperactive teen is in charge of taking photographs and projecting overhead slides, another teen operates the lights, and several more work in the coffeehouse. This strategy is consistent with one of the precepts espoused by SFM, that these church programs facilitate the expression of each believer's call to service.

This sense of evangelical community extends beyond the walls of one suburban church. Religious practices such as CCM help *imagine* (Anderson 1983) a community of evangelical Christians, most of whom will never meet in person. Like other forms of religious media (Kong 2006: 912), CCM helps generate an evangelical community that is not spatially contiguous.

SFM is one of fourteen Sacramento metro area affiliates of Calvary Chapel, the now-ubiquitous nondenominational evangelical church that pioneered the incorporation of rock music into evangelical church services in the late 1960s (Romanowski 2000; Thompson 2000). While relatively organizationally independent from Chuck Smith's original Calvary Chapel in suburban Orange County, California, Calvary Chapels emphasize verse-by-verse biblical preaching put in a contemporary context and tend to prioritize God's love over judgment or sin (Wuthnow 2003: 159). Almost all Calvary Chapel congregants would claim to be 'born again' (Miller 1997: 198). Like other Calvary affiliates, SFM eschews formal membership, denominational creeds, stodgy sermons, and any semblance of a dress code. Suburban Sacramento is thus connected

to more than 1,200 Calvary Chapel affiliates around the world. Further, since Calvary Chapels adopt a straightforward evangelical Christian theology—including salvation through faith rather than works; Jesus's deity, atoning death, and resurrection; the Bible as the authoritative word of God; and the obligation to perform ministry—the evangelicals of suburban Sacramento are related by faith and lifestyle to the many millions of Americans who espouse such beliefs.

First Friday forges a sense of place in suburban Sacramento, one that is not defined by social alienation and uncontrolled change, but rather by connection to other evangelical Christians and the Nashville-based CCM industry. By reconceptualizing a Sacramento suburb as a hearth of evangelical community, CCM unites the evangelical flock on the basis of faith rather than neighborhood.

### **The sacred space of the Solid Grounds coffeehouse**

Understanding how this religious community can be produced acoustically (Lee 1999: 87) requires another spatial lens—that of a temporarily sacred space within the church. Creating a community of evangelical Christians, and in doing so sustaining the CCM industry, involves a metamorphosis of suburban social spaces. By transforming the Solid Grounds coffeehouse venue into a sacred space, CCM qualifies as one of the 'new processes and rituals' that define an everyday space as sacred (Kiong and Kong 2000: 31).

Little about the architecture of SFM would immediately connote the sacred. The physical structure of SFM constitutes what has become a typical American church landscape (Zelinsky 2001): a large, three-story beige

building surrounded by hundreds of parking spaces in a business park. Signified by a ground-story black awning, the Solid Grounds Coffeehouse makes up one wing of the SFM complex. Unlike a nearby, more ostentatious evangelical megachurch, which is emblazoned with a forty-foot cross, SFM does not display a cross on the outside of the building. Only the outline of a dove and the name of the church inform passing drivers that SFM is not another office complex or warehouse. There are also no crosses in the main auditorium or in the coffeehouse, an iconoclasm that is common in nondenominational evangelical megachurches.

SFM's nondescript exterior does not house a conspicuously religious interior, but rather a hybrid physical space that mixes secular and sacred spatial practices (Kong 2002: 1581). Inside the coffeehouse, the hand-painted sign behind the stage, a row of Apple computers, a darkened Christian bookshop, a fully equipped coffee bar, and stacks of unused chairs and tables indicate that this space functions as the home of thrice-weekly worship services, marriage seminars, and other church events. Meanwhile, the sound board, large speaker system, raised stage, amateur photographs of musicians and fans projected onto a screen, and remotely controlled stage lights suggest that the Solid Grounds Coffeehouse hosts musical events.

Rather than architecture or interior design, social practices define this incongruous coffeehouse as a sacred space. On the first Friday of every month, a large group of teenage boys and girls, a few parents, the occasional toddler or baby, and a handful of organizers in their twenties and thirties gather in the Solid Grounds Coffeehouse for an evening of Christian popular music. After performing two acts for roughly 40 minutes each, the church's high school youth pastor delivers a

spoken message for 10 minutes and concludes with a prayer. Music, prayer, and brief sermons at First Friday create a 'ritual space', a sacred space that 'acquires sanctity from repeated ritual use' (Stump 2008: 304).

Much of First Friday's CCM exemplifies the variants of loud, aggressive rock music categorized as alternative rock, emocore, metalcore, hardcore, screamo, punk, and metal. Hip-hop is also popular at First Friday, where rappers perform along with pre-recorded beats played from a CD or MP3 player. A third style common on the First Friday stage is piano-driven or acoustic guitar-based soft rock influenced by Christian praise and worship artists such as Chris Tomlin as well as by general market stars Coldplay or Sarah McLachlan.

While these musical styles are not performed in exclusively religious contexts, the lyrics at First Friday do render the coffeehouse space sacred. In addition to love-struck diary entries and unintelligible guttural growls, the lyrics performed at First Friday include vertical conversations with God and religious entreaties to the audience. A rapper named Full Submersion implored the crowd to 'stay close to Jesus like chocolate and peanut butter in a Reese's pieces'. A singer-songwriter crooned along with tinkling electric piano keys, 'Jesus Christ loves his church, the bride and groom'. The rock power trio Starring Morgan Freeman encouraged the vocalist's young son to 'lay down your burdens and follow Jesus', while solo acoustic act Josiah James begged an unnamed listener to 'just open up your eyes and see the light in front of you'.

In addition to performing music, evangelical Christians sanctify the space of the coffeehouse through the frequent evocation of prayer. At a First Friday event, the organizers pray twice—in a back room with the bands

before the concert, and with the audience after the pastor's message. The backstage prayer, usually led by a youth pastor or another older organizer, tends to petition God to bless the event, appeal that Satan be banished from the building, and request that God reach people in the audience. It is common for both prayers to ask, 'Father God, let us use our talents to glorify you', and to conclude, 'In Jesus' name, Amen'.

The space of the coffeehouse also becomes sacred through the content of the youth pastor's spoken messages. These brief sermons tend to emphasize turning to Christ as the antidote to worldly day-to-day concerns, from feeling alone to pursuing one's passion. These messages tie everyday topics such as New Year's resolutions to the life of Jesus, concluding that Jesus will not forsake us, or that Jesus can help with big and small challenges. The post-concert messages often stress that one cannot disqualify oneself from Jesus' love, and that one can always come back to Jesus despite doubts or 'sinful' actions. One message emphasized the role of God in creating varied forms of music, portraying the creativity of the bands and other talents (even a talent for picking raffle names out of a coffee can) as a gift from God. This notion of an ever-present God erodes any distinction between sacred and secular spaces or times of day, such that Christianity becomes a way of being rather than a once-a-week activity. Accordingly, a First Friday band announced its break-up to the MySpace social network in the following way: 'Chris is currently praying for what God has for him whether it's with us, on his own or someone completely different. Be praying and looking out for us!!!!'

### **The embodied practices of First Friday concerts**

While CCM's pastoral role operates through the production of sacred social spaces such as the SFM coffeehouse, these religious spaces are enacted through bodily practices (Holloway and Valins 2002: 8). An understanding of CCM as composed of embodied practices identifies the corporeal realm as a crucial site in the production of subjectivities, or how individuals perceive themselves in the world. First Friday highlights how the production of religious subjectivities (Gokariksel 2009) and musical meanings (Smith 2000b: 630) operate through the human body. The bodies at First Friday concerts indicate how CCM's pastoral role is habitual as well as affective, how the church provides programs for the entire family, and how subtle politics of gender and race play out at First Friday.

Other scholars have used the scale of the body to emphasize the affective or emotional elements of religion (Holloway 2006) and music (Anderson 2004; Grossberg 1992; Smith 2000b: 619). Yet, the bodily actions at First Friday suggest that the concerts reinforce evangelical faith not by producing a transcendent emotive moment, but by making every action a Christian action. Monthly, weekly, and even daily participation in activities infused with Christianity generates the sense of being Christian and a member of a Christian community. Each of these religious practices builds on prior ones (Mahmood 2001: 216; McDannell 1995: 272), over time creating a series of bodily dispositions (Yeh and Lama 2006: 819). While stereotypes of 'born-again experiences' imply a quick blinding flash of light, many evangelicals describe becoming 'born again' as a process that occurs over weeks, months, or even years. Despite the

entreaties of pastors and musicians to ‘let Jesus into your heart’, the bodies of First Friday suggest that the pastoral production of evangelical faith and community is achieved more through habitual practices than through either conscious deliberation or emotive feeling.

This habitual, reiterative embodiment of faith is manifested in SFM’s complicated relationship with affect. Calvary Chapels such as SFM tend to incorporate the emotional worship found in Pentecostal churches, but do not consider ‘gifts of the spirit’ such as speaking in tongues to be the only or primary evidence of spiritual authority. A pastor described the SFM approach as ‘charismatic but not charismania’. Another explained that spiritual gifts ‘are good things and can be useful, but there is a proper time, and doing those things for show is obviously not good at all’. One organizer and musician at SFM criticized a white Pentecostal church in the Sacramento area for pressuring congregants to ‘fake’ gifts of the spirit. Despite skepticism of the individual spiritual authority of full-blown Pentecostalism, SFM holds small gatherings for speaking in tongues and healings called ‘afterglow’ services. Several SFM members claim to have witnessed or experienced such spiritual gifts.

Congregants at SFM express this emotional aspect of religious faith when listening to praise and worship songs, the contemporary hymns that feature drums and electric guitars. During music services on Saturdays, Sundays, and Wednesdays, churchgoers extend their palms in supplication and wipe away tears. The corporeal experience of listening, singing along, and raising one’s hands in the air produces a profound feeling or emotion that strengthens the sense of being an evangelical Christian.

Yet, these bodily expressions of faith are rarely performed at First Friday concerts. First Friday audiences behave as if they are at a secular concert much more than at a worship service. Before, during, and after the performances, crowds of teens ranging from 30 to 150 mill around the coffeehouse, some standing directly in front of a louder band, others sitting down on the floor in front of quieter acts, a few joining the attending parents on the two dozen plastic chairs. Metal and hardcore bands inspire the crowd to jump up and down. Teenage girls text-message friends and giggle to each other, while boys jerk around wildly and bump into each other in harmless mosh pits. The teens at First Friday adopt the fashion of middle class white suburbia: jeans that are quite baggy or overly tight, T-shirts emblazoned with the name of the ‘hipper’ Christian rock bands (Underoath, Anberlin, Norma Jean, August Burns Red) or secular acts (Tool, Rancid, HIM), hooded sweatshirts, asymmetrical haircuts, and baseball hats at inventive angles. Few at a First Friday concert would appear out of place at a suburban movie theater on a Friday night.

First Friday reinforces faith not by moving the audience affectively, but by articulating everyday practices as Christian. First Friday is an explicit attempt on the part of the organizers ‘to propagate culturally appropriate music’ to evangelical Christian youth—to bring the evangelical faith into the realm of the everyday. To this end, First Friday concert events persuade Christian teens and pre-teens that they can be themselves—interested in loud music and violent movies, insecure, flawed—and still be Christians.

However, this blending, or negotiation, of the secular and sacred runs the risk of despiritualizing the same space CCM renders sacred. During the youth pastor’s message, organizers repeatedly need to instruct the



crowd to come inside and stop talking. Young adults can sometimes be seen outside smoking cigarettes, despite the prohibition of smoking and drinking on church grounds. After one concert, a teen couple snuggled on a couch during the youth pastor's message. At the same time that the evangelical faith extends into previously secular Friday nights, secular norms infiltrate the church coffeehouse.

Still, the bodies at First Friday are not identical to those at a secular concert. The presence of small children on the floor immediately distinguishes the scene at First Friday from a nightclub or large concert arena. At one performance, as the three members of the Blue Letter created heavy metal-influenced soundscapes amidst blinking guitar pedals and sopping-wet long hair, the bassist's young son crawled under chairs and his newborn listened from a baby carrier. A few months later, the lead vocalist of The Color Amnesty clutched his shaved head and growled his way through metalcore songs while his toddler son cheered him on. Parents and siblings routinely come to show support for performers. These families are large; one organizer has six children, another has eight siblings, and yet another has nine. Wedding rings, even on musicians in their early twenties, are common at First Friday. The bodies of various ages at a First Friday concert emphasize how SFM produces community by providing services for the entire family.

Elements of embodied gender difference are also on display at First Friday. The audiences are roughly half female, but very few of the performers are women; in twenty-two concert events of at least two acts each, I saw one female drummer play twice, one solo performer play once, another play twice, and one female guest singer perform one song. When the wives of performers come to the event, they are often busy looking after children.

Breadwinning and semi-professional music-making seem to be gendered 'male' among First Friday participants, while the bulk of the child care and home schooling seem to be handled by the wives. Further, the youth pastors who deliver the after-concert message are exclusively male, in accordance with the dominant white evangelical Christian edict that women should not preach to men as pastors.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, women perform music at SFM as part of the worship band, lead women's services, and often play a key role in the organization of First Friday events. Unlike other observers of evangelical Christian gender relations (Sandler 2006: 40), I do not assume that religious women perform tasks against their will or against their best interests. The preponderance of males among the older organizers and performers suggests that husbands may have privileged access to such leisure activities, but the female bodies at First Friday do not completely lack agency.

In contrast to many evangelical churches and other CCM events throughout the country, not all of the bodies at First Friday are white. As could be expected for the soundtrack of a historically segregated evangelical tradition (Emerson and Smith 2000; Garces-Foley 2008: 20), CCM in most of the US produces an unquestionably white collective identity. White evangelical Protestants and their African-American theological brethren generally listen to different forms of Christian music obtained from different retailers (Harrison 2005: 35). Heavily African-American Christian hip-hop and R&B only account for 2 per cent of the CCM industry's record sales (Lindenbaum 2009a), and the definition of CCM employed by the music industry and adopted in this article does not include traditional black gospel. Gospel Music Association awards for New Artist of the Year,



Songwriter of the Year, and Song of the Year almost always go to white performers, while African-American artists are herded into the traditional gospel, contemporary gospel, rap/hip-hop, and urban categories (Beaujon 2006: 175). As African-American Michael Tait, member of platinum-selling CCM group dcTalk explains, 'The whole CCM market is mostly well-heeled white masses' (Alfonso 2002: 72).

The practices of CCM do not produce whiteness through victimhood or nostalgia, as has been argued about country music (Mann 2007: 83), but instead through bodily absence (Kobayashi and Peake 2000: 399). African-American bodies are rare in the white evangelical spaces of CCM festivals, church auditoriums, and concert arenas, and also in some of the suburbs that provide CCM with much of its audience. White suburban and exurban evangelical churches require large cheap expanses of land, and consequently lack visual reminders of racial segregation and its ills (Wolfe 2003: 201). CCM helps alleviate the isolation of contemporary suburban life by bringing its listeners more firmly into the white evangelical community, but in doing so, reaffirms the political culture of suburban whiteness (Avila 2004: 228) forged in the Orange County suburbs that spawned CCM and some of its home churches.

If any place could prove to be a counter-example to the racial insularity of national-scale CCM, it would be Sacramento. Sacramento has been crowned as the most racially and ethnically integrated city in the country (Stodghill and Bower 2002), as well as a 'melting pot metro' (Frey 2001). Though not to the extent of Sacramento's neighborhoods and public schools, SFM has diversified its membership over the past decade. At weekend services, the majority white congregants sit alongside families of African-Americans, East

Asian-Americans, South Asian-Americans, and Latinos. Further, many SFM members have adopted children of color. First Friday performances have featured an African-American magician, an African-American drummer, a few Asian-American pop-punk musicians, and a dozen fans of color.

Most noticeably, on four occasions, First Friday booked a hip-hop group composed of one white and three African-American young men. Soul Hustle, as the rap collective is called, differs theologically and stylistically from the other acts at First Friday, even the other two (white) hip-hop acts that have appeared there. The members of Soul Hustle adhere to a much more charismatic or Pentecostal form of Christianity, carrying Bibles at all times and emphasizing the visceral effects of the Holy Spirit. At the end of one set, one rapper kneeled facing away from the stage with his hands in the air. Band members muttered 'praise Jesus' and unintelligible 'tongues' during the backroom prayer before the concert. Onstage, the Soul Hustle rappers told anecdotes about avoiding gang life and street violence that could not have resonated with many of the white middle class audience members. Using stronger language than any white performer, lead rapper Exoduz proclaimed, 'If you have been molested, raped, and on drugs, have parents on drugs, are on the drink... you can come to Christ like you are. Your sins have already been paid for'. Soul Hustle code themselves as both racially and musically 'Other', but by performing at First Friday, they include themselves within the boundaries of evangelical Christianity.

One element of whiteness is its transparency, or the lack of awareness among whites that they are a racialized and privileged group (Edwards 2008: 6). By helping to create a community that considers itself to be neither racist nor racialized, CCM designates race as

the ‘unspeakable’ (Pred 2001: 119). The ‘blindness’ afforded race reconfigures racism as a ‘personal’ failing, absolving the white evangelical community from responsibility for structural inequalities (Harrison 2005: 32). If the invisibility of whiteness obfuscates white privilege (Lipsitz 1998; Pulido 2000) and reduces racism to atypical discriminatory acts (Delaney 2002: 11), the racial heterogeneity of First Friday at least illuminates this whiteness. Though not manifesting complete ethnic transcendence, such that shared religious identity has fully superseded ethnic identity (Marti 2008: 14), First Friday’s partial measures toward musical and religious desegregation could forestall further racial insularity. Such musical miscegenation has political ramifications; scholars claim that contact with African-Americans can lead white evangelicals to cite structural rather than individual-level explanations for poverty and inequality (Emerson and Smith 2000: 107).

The presence of nonwhite bodies on the First Friday stage and in the audience exemplifies how embodied rituals can bridge racial boundaries (Dougherty and Huyser 2008: 28; Warner 1997) and how music can contest racial divisions (Smith 1997: 519). By expanding the conception of evangelical affiliation to include Christians of color, as well as family members of various ages, these musical practices indicate the dynamism of evangelical community identities. While performing the pastoral role of guiding evangelical Christians in their ‘walk’, CCM also helps delineate which bodies compose the flock.

### **Conclusion: the spiritualization of everyday life**

The First Friday concerts reveal CCM’s pastoral function—the reinforcement of evan-

gelical faith, generation of community sentiment, and designation of who comprises the flock—to be habitual, permeating everyday life. At First Friday, Christian faith saturates the realm of the everyday life through the provision of activities for the entire family, frequent prayer, the linking of Jesus with the quotidian in pastoral messages, the encouragement of youth participation, and the on-stage positioning of musical performances as religious as well as entertainment practices. By performing its pastoral role, CCM helps constitute a cohesive evangelical Christian lifestyle, or a ‘whole way of life’ (Williams 1977: 13).

For example, before each First Friday event, the organizers and I would go out to dinner in one of a few restaurants near the church. When the food arrived, one of the older First Friday organizers would ask the assembled 5–10 friends to bow their heads in prayer, and would thank God for the food, the fellowship of those at the table, and the ability to put on the night’s concert. For a brief moment, a table at a Mexican restaurant in a suburban strip mall became a sacred space, suggesting just how thoroughly community fellowship and evangelical faith are imbued into the everyday lives of evangelical Christians.

My observations in one Sacramento suburb indicate how evangelical faith might operate in other arenas. The spaces of the bedroom, classroom, workplace, and car interior might also be transformed through evangelical habits. Listening to a sermon podcast while walking to work, whispering a quick prayer before lunch in a public school cafeteria, crossing oneself before a recreational soccer game, or attaching a Jesus fish car magnet to the back of a minivan—all of these practices infuse the everyday life with religious faith.

The experiences of a few dozen music fans in Sacramento also support the scholarly claim that ‘religion . . . is lived as part of everyday life in a variety of spaces and scales’ (Gokariksel 2009: 669). First Friday shows how the pastoral role of CCM operates through the spatial scales of place, space, and the body. These concerts demonstrate how the place of a Sacramento suburb can be redefined in terms of interconnection with the CCM industry and the evangelical community, how musical practices can produce a sacred evangelical space, and how such practices are embodied. These three scales share the contradictions that plague this pastoral process: potential exclusion based on race and gender, a conflicted relationship with the CCM industry, and the accommodation of secular norms in an ostensibly religious context.

Further, these Sacramento concerts illustrate how the scales of everyday evangelical life are interrelated. At First Friday, the need for community in suburban Sacramento is satisfied in the space of the coffee shop, which is rendered sacred through bodily practices within its walls. The social and political consequences of such practices also transcend scales, indicating how religious musical practices pertain to broader questions of power and politics. As I argue elsewhere (Lindenbaum 2011), the evangelical faith and community sentiment fostered in everyday spaces such as CCM venues influence and fund evangelical nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the Global South. Therefore, the white evangelical bodies at First Friday are not the only bodies in question; the interrelation of scales suggests that what takes place in suburban Sacramento also concerns the bodies of people in sub-Saharan Africa and India who interact with CCM’s preferred faith-based NGOs. Consequently, an understanding of seemingly distant foreign development pro-

jects necessitates considering how CCM fuels faith and community sentiment amongst the domestic flock.

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## Notes

- 1 To protect the identities of my research subjects, I have changed the name of the church and coffeehouse, and do not cite its website.
- 2 Adorno’s rather pessimistic theory likens the popular music of the ‘culture industry’ to other mass-produced consumer products, claiming that the profit-motivated industry’s formulaic, repetitive, standardized output yields audience passivity.
- 3 This policy derives in part from the Apostle Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians that women should not speak in church. 1 Corinthians 14: 34–35 (NIV) reads, ‘. . . women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church’.

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### Abstract translations

*Le rôle pastoral de la musique chrétienne contemporaine: La spiritualisation de la vie de tous les jours dans une « méga-église » évangélique de banlieue*

La musique chrétienne contemporaine, une musique pop dans laquelle figurent les paroles chrétiennes évangéliques, est une des formes de divertissement commercial les plus largement consommées par les 70 à 80 millions de chrétiens évangéliques blancs d'Amérique. La musique chrétienne contemporaine (MCC) sert comme dispositif très utile pour étudier les interactions complexes de la foi religieuse, le sentiment communautaire, et les pratiques de la musique pop dans les EU d'aujourd'hui. J'explique comment la MCC exécute la tâche « pastorale » de renforcer la foi chrétienne dans une « méga-église » évangélique située dans la banlieue de Sacramento, Californie. Je soutiens qu'une série mensuelle de

concerts fonctionne non seulement en guidant les chrétiens évangéliques dans leur « parcours », mais aide aussi à constituer le « troupeau » en construisant un sens de communauté. Je propose trois analytiques spatiales pour comprendre le rôle pastoral de la MCC: le lieu de l'église, l'espace saint du café de l'église, et le corps. A tous les trois échelons d'analyse, les pratiques musicales et religieuses de la MCC à une église de banlieue rendent spirituelle la vie de tous les jours des participants.

**Mots-clés:** musique, christianisme, banlieue, religion, communauté, vie de tous les jours.

*El Rollo Pastoral de Música Contemporánea Cristiana: La Espiritualización de la Vida Cotidiana en una Mega-Iglesia Evangélica Suburbana*

Música Contemporánea Cristiana, música popular con letra evangélica cristiana, es uno de las formas más consumidas de entretenimiento comercial para

los 70 a 80 millones de Cristianos Evangélicos en los Estados Unidos. Música Contemporánea Cristiana (MCC) en un lente excelente para examinar las interacciones complejas de la fe religiosa, sentimiento comunitario, y prácticas de música popular en los EEUU contemporáneos. Explico como el MCC se actúa la tarea 'pastoral' de reforzar la fe Cristiana en una mega-iglesia en las afueras de Sacramento, California. Discuto que un serie de conciertos mensuales no sólo guía los Cristianos Evangélicos en su 'camino', sino que también ayuda constituir el rebaño por construir un sentido de comunidad. Propongo tres analíticos espaciales para entender el rollo pastoral de MCC: el lugar de las afueras, el espacio sagrado del café de la iglesia, y el cuerpo. En las tres escalas de análisis, las prácticas musicales y religiosas de MCC en una iglesia suburbana espiritualizan las practicas cotidianas de los participantes.

**Palabras claves:** música, Cristianismo, las afueras, religión, comunidad, vida cotidiana.



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